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HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

New Edition

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HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY H. A. TAINE, D.C.L.

Translated from the French by H. Van Laun

One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

THIS edition of Taine's History of English Literature has been carefully revised and compared with the original. All the quotations have been collated and verified anew, and no trouble has been spared to make it as accurate as possible.

For the favourable reception this translation has met with from the press and the public, I feel much indebted.

H. VAN LAUN.

THE ACADEMY,
EDINBURGH, *May* 31, 1873.

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INTRODUCTION.

> The historian might place himself for a given period, say a series of ages, or in the human soul, or with some particular people; he might study, describe, relate, all the events, all the transformations, all the revolutions which had been accomplished in the internal man; and when he had finished his work, he would have a history of civilisation amongst the people and in the period he had selected.—GUIZOT, *Civilisation in Europe*, p. 25.

HISTORY has been transformed, within a hundred years in Germany, within sixty years in France, and that by the study of their literatures.

It was perceived that a literary work is not a mere individual play of imagination, the isolated caprice of an excited brain, but a transcript of contemporary manners, a manifestation of a certain kind of mind. It was concluded that we might recover, from the monuments of literature, a knowledge of the manner in which men thought and felt centuries ago. The attempt was made, and it succeeded.

Pondering on these modes of feeling and thought, men decided that they were facts of the highest kind. They saw that these facts bore reference to the most important occurrences, that they explained and were explained by them, that it was necessary thenceforth to give them a rank, and a most important rank, in history. This rank they have received, and from that moment history has undergone a complete change: in its subject-matter, its system, its machinery, the appre-

ciation of laws and of causes. It is this change, such as it is and must be, that we shall here endeavour to exhibit.

I.

Historical documents serve only as a clue to reconstruct the visible individual.

What is your first remark on turning over the great, stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript, —a poem, a code of laws, a confession of faith? This, you say, did not come into existence all alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a man. Why do you study the shell, except to bring before you the animal? So you study the document only to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clue to the entire and living existence. We must get hold of this existence, endeavour to re-create it. It is a mistake to study the document, as if it were isolated. This were to treat things like a simple scholar, to fall into the error of the bibliomaniac. Neither mythology nor languages exist in themselves; but only men, who arrange words and imagery according to the necessities of their organs and the original bent of their intellects. A dogma is nothing in itself; look at the people who have made it,—a portrait, for instance, of the sixteenth century, say the stern powerful face of an English archbishop or martyr. Nothing exists except through some individual man; it is this individual with whom we must become acquainted. When we have established the parentage of dogmas, or the classification of poems, or the progress of constitutions, or the transformation of idioms, we have only cleared the soil: genuine history is brought into existence only when the historian begins

to unravel, across the lapse of time, the living man, toiling, impassioned, entrenched in his customs, with his voice and features, his gestures and his dress, distinct and complete as he from whom we have just parted in the street. Let us endeavour, then, to annihilate as far as possible this great interval of time, which prevents us from seeing man with our eyes, with the eyes of our head. What have we under the fair glazed pages of a modern poem? A modern poet, who has studied and travelled, a man like Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, or Heine, in a black coat and gloves, welcomed by the ladies, and making every evening his fifty bows and his score of bon-mots in society, reading the papers in the morning, lodging as a rule on a second floor; not over gay, because he has nerves, and especially because, in this dense democracy where we choke one another, the discredit of the dignities of office has exaggerated his pretensions while increasing his importance, and because the keenness of his feelings in general disposes him somewhat to believe himself a deity. This is what we take note of under modern Meditations or Sonnets. Even so, under a tragedy of the seventeenth century we have a poet, like Racine for instance, elegant, staid, a courtier, a fine talker, with a majestic wig and ribboned shoes, at heart a royalist and a Christian, who says, "God has been so gracious to me, that in whatever company I find myself I never have occasion to blush for the gospel or the king;"[1] clever at entertaining the prince, and rendering

[1] Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, p. 25, says, in quoting this passage, "What could be expected from the courtier who could write in these terms to Madame de Maintenon."—TR

for him into good French the "old French of Amyot;" very respectful to the great, always "knowing his place;" as assiduous and reserved at Marly as at Versailles, amidst the regular pleasures of polished and ornate nature, amidst the salutations, graces, airs, and fopperies of the braided lords, who rose early in the morning to obtain the promise of being appointed to some office in case of the death of the present holder, and amongst charming ladies who count their genealogies on their fingers in order to obtain the right of sitting down in the presence of the King or Queen. On that head consult St. Simon and the engravings of Pérelle, as for the present age you have consulted Balzac and the water-colours of Eugène Lami. Similarly, when we read a Greek tragedy, our first care should be to realise to ourselves the Greeks, that is, the men who live half naked, in the gymnasia, or in the public squares, under a glowing sky, face to face with the most beautiful and the most noble landscapes, bent on making their bodies lithe and strong, on conversing, discussing, voting, carrying on patriotic piracies, nevertheless lazy and temperate, with three urns for their furniture, two anchovies in a jar of oil for their food, waited on by slaves, so as to give them leisure to cultivate their understanding and exercise their limbs, with no desire beyond that of having the most beautiful town, the most beautiful processions, the most beautiful ideas, the most beautiful men. On this subject, a statue such as the Meleager or the Theseus of the Parthenon, or still more, the sight of the Mediterranean, blue and lustrous as a silken tunic, and the islands that stud it with their massive marble outlines: add to these twenty select phrases from Plato and Aristophanes, and they will teach you much more than a multi-

tude of dissertations and commentaries. And so again, in order to understand an Indian Purāna, begin by imagining to yourself the father of a family, who, "having seen a son on his son's knees," retires, according to the law, into solitude, with an axe and a pitcher under a banyan tree, by the brook-side, talks no more, adds fast to fast, dwells naked between four fires, and under that terrible sun, which devours and renews without end all things living; who, for weeks at a time, fixes his imagination first upon the feet of Brahma, next upon his knee, next upon his thigh, next upon his navel, and so on, until, beneath the strain of this intense meditation, hallucinations begin to appear, until all the forms of existence, mingled and transformed the one with the other, quaver before a sight dazzled and giddy, until the motionless man, catching in his breath, with fixed gaze, beholds the universe vanishing like a smoke in the universal void of Being into which he hopes to be absorbed. To this end a voyage to India would be the best instructor; or for want of better, the accounts of travellers, books of geography, botany, ethnology, will serve their turn. In each case the search must be the same. Language, legislation, creeds, are only abstract things: the complete thing is the man who acts, the man corporeal and visible, who eats, walks, fights, labours. Leave aside the theory and the mechanism of constitutions, religions and their systems, and try to see men in their workshops, in their offices, in their fields, with their sky and soil, their houses, their dress, cultivations, meals, as you do when, landing in England or Italy, you look at faces and motions, roads and inns, a citizen taking his walk, a workman drinking. Our great care should

be to supply as much as possible the want of present, personal, direct, and sensible observation which we can no longer practise; for it is the only means of knowing men. Let us make the past present: in order to judge of a thing, it must be before us; there is no experience in respect of what is absent. Doubtless this reconstruction is always incomplete; it can produce only incomplete judgments; but that we cannot help. It is better to have an imperfect knowledge than none at all; and there is no other means of acquainting ourselves approximately with the events of other days, than to *see* approximately the men of other days.

This is the first step in history; it was made in Europe at the revival of imagination, toward the close of the last century, by Lessing and Walter Scott; a little later in France, by Chateaubriand, Augustin Thierry, Michelet, and others. And now for the second step.

II.

The outer man is only a clue to study the inner, invisible man.

When you consider with your eyes the visible man, what do you look for? The man invisible. The words which enter your ears, the gestures, the motions of his head, the clothes he wears, visible acts and deeds of every kind, are expressions merely; somewhat is revealed beneath them, and that is a soul. An inner man is concealed beneath the outer man; the second does but reveal the first. You look at his house, furniture, dress; and that in order to discover in them the marks of his habits and tastes, the degree of his refinement or rusticity, his extravagance or his economy, his stupidity or his acuteness. You listen to his conversation, and you note the inflexions of his voice, the changes in his

attitudes; and that in order to judge of his vivacity, his self-forgetfulness or his gaiety, his energy or his constraint. You consider his writings, his artistic productions, his business transactions or political ventures; and that in order to measure the scope and limits of his intelligence, his inventiveness, his coolness, to find out the order, the character, the general force of his ideas, the mode in which he thinks and resolves. All these externals are but avenues converging towards a centre; you enter them simply in order to reach that centre; and that centre is the genuine man, I mean that mass of faculties and feelings which are the inner man. We have reached a new world, which is infinite, because every action which we see involves an infinite association of reasonings, emotions, sensations new and old, which have served to bring it to light, and which, like great rocks deep-seated in the ground, find in it their end and their level. This underworld is a new subject-matter, proper to the historian. If his critical education is sufficient, he can lay bare, under every detail of architecture, every stroke in a picture, every phrase in a writing, the special sensation whence detail, stroke, or phrase had issue; he is present at the drama which was enacted in the soul of artist or writer; the choice of a word, the brevity or length of a sentence, the nature of a metaphor, the accent of a verse, the development of an argument—everything is a symbol to him; while his eyes read the text, his soul and mind pursue the continuous development and the everchanging succession of the emotions and conceptions out of which the text has sprung: in short, he works out its psychology. If you would observe this operation, consider the originator and model of all grand contemporary culture, Goethe,

who, before writing *Iphigenia*, employed day after day in making drawings of the most finished statues, and who at last, his eyes filled with the noble forms of ancient scenery, his mind penetrated by the harmonious loveliness of antique life, succeeded in reproducing so exactly in himself the habits and peculiarities of the Greek imagination, that he gives us almost the twin sister of the Antigone of Sophocles, and the goddesses of Phidias. This precise and proved interpretation of past sensations has given to history, in our days, a second birth; hardly anything of the sort was known to the preceding century. They thought men of every race and century were all but identical; the Greek, the barbarian, the Hindoo, the man of the Renaissance, and the man of the eighteenth century, as if they had been turned out of a common mould; and all in conformity to a certain abstract conception, which served for the whole human race. They knew man, but not men; they had not penetrated to the soul; they had not seen the infinite diversity and marvellous complexity of souls; they did not know that the moral constitution of a people or an age is as particular and distinct as the physical structure of a family of plants or an order of animals. Now-a-days, history, like zoology, has found its anatomy; and whatever the branch of history to which you devote yourself, philology, linguistic lore, mythology, it is by these means you must strive to produce new fruit. Amid so many writers who, since the time of Herder, Ottfried Müller, and Goethe, have continued and still improve this great method, let the reader consider only two historians and two works, Carlyle's *Cromwell*, and Sainte-Beuve's *Port-Royal:* he will see with what fairness, exactness, depth of insight, a man may discover a soul

beneath its actions and its works; how behind the old general, in place of a vulgar hypocritical schemer, we recover a man troubled with the obscure reveries of a melancholic imagination, but with practical instincts and faculties, English to the core, strange and incomprehensible to one who has not studied the climate and the race; how, with about a hundred meagre letters and a score of mutilated speeches, we may follow him from his farm and team, to the general's tent and to the Protector's throne, in his transmutation and development, in his pricks of conscience and his political sagacity, until the machinery of his mind and actions becomes visible, and the inner tragedy, ever changing and renewed, which exercised this great, darkling soul, passes, like one of Shakspeare's, through the soul of the looker-on. He will see (in the other case) how, behind the squabbles of the monastery, or the contumacies of nuns, he may find a great province of human psychology; how about fifty characters, that had been buried under the uniformity of a circumspect narrative, reappear in the light of day, each with its own specialty and its countless diversities; how, beneath theological disquisitions and monotonous sermons, we can unearth the beatings of living hearts, the convulsions and apathies of monastic life, the unforeseen reassertions and wavy turmoil of nature, the inroads of surrounding worldliness, the intermittent victories of grace, with such a variety of lights and shades, that the most exhaustive description and the most elastic style can hardly gather the inexhaustible harvest, which the critic has caused to spring up on this abandoned field. And so it is throughout. Germany, with its genius so pliant, so comprehensive, so apt for transformation, so well calculated to reproduce the most

remote and anomalous conditions of human thought; England, with its intellect so precise, so well calculated to grapple closely with moral questions, to render them exact by figures, weights and measures, geography, statistics, by quotation and by common sense; France, with her Parisian culture, with her drawing-room manners, with her untiring analysis of characters and actions, her irony so ready to hit upon a weakness, her finesse so practised in the discrimination of shades of thought;—all have worked the same soil, and we begin to understand that there is no region of history where it is not imperative to till this deep level, if we would see a serviceable harvest rise between the furrows.

This is the second step; we are in a fair way to its completion. It is the fit work of the contemporary critic. No one has done it so justly and grandly as Sainte-Beuve: in this respect we are all his pupils; his method has revolutionised, in our days, in books, and even in newspapers, every kind of literary, of philosophical and religious criticism. From it we must set out in order to begin the further development. I have more than once endeavoured to indicate this development; there is here, in my mind, a new path open to history, and I will try to describe it more in detail.

III.

The state and the actions of the inner and invisible man have their causes in certain general ways of thought and feeling.

When you have observed and noted in man one, two, three, then a multitude of sensations, does this suffice, or does your knowledge appear complete? Is Psychology only a series of observations? No; here as elsewhere we must search out the causes after we have collected the facts. No matter if the facts be

physical or moral, they all have their causes; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon arises from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs. Let us then seek the simple phenomena for moral qualities, as we seek them for physical qualities; and let us take the first fact that presents itself: for example, religious music, that of a Protestant Church. There is an inner cause which has turned the spirit of the faithful toward these grave and monotonous melodies, a cause broader than its effect; I mean the general idea of the true, external worship which man owes to God. It is this which has modelled the architecture of Protestant places of worship, thrown down the statues, removed the pictures, destroyed the ornaments, curtailed the ceremonies, shut up the worshippers in high pews which prevent them from seeing anything, and regulated the thousand details of decoration, posture, and general externals. This again comes from another more general cause, the idea of human conduct in all its comprehensiveness, internal and external, prayers, actions, duties of every kind which man owes to God; it is this which has enthroned the doctrine of grace, lowered the status of the clergy, transformed the sacraments, suppressed various practices, and changed religion from a discipline to a morality. This second idea in its turn depends upon a third still more general, that of moral perfection, such as is met with in the perfect God, the unerring judge, the stern watcher of souls, before whom every soul is sinful, worthy of punishment, incapable of virtue or salvation, except by the power of conscience which

He calls forth, and the renewal of heart which He produces. That is the master idea, which consists in erecting duty into an absolute king of human life, and in prostrating all ideal models before a moral model. Here we track the root of man; for to explain this conception it is necessary to consider the race itself, the German and Northman, the structure of his character and mind, his general processes of thought and feeling, the sluggishness and coldness of sensation which prevent his falling easily and headlong under the sway of pleasure, the bluntness of his taste, the irregularity and revolutions of his conception, which arrest in him the birth of fair dispositions and harmonious forms, the disdain of appearances, the desire for truth, the attachment to bare and abstract ideas, which develop in him conscience, at the expense of all else. There the search is at an end; we have arrived at a primitive disposition; at a feature peculiar to all the sensations, and to all the conceptions of a century or a race, at a particularity inseparable from all the motions of his intellect and his heart. Here lie the grand causes, for they are the universal and permanent causes, present at every moment and in every case, everywhere and always acting, indestructible, and finally infallibly supreme, since the accidents which thwart them, being limited and partial, end by yielding to the dull and incessant repetition of their efforts; in such a manner that the general structure of things, and the grand features of events, are their work; and religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families, are in fact only the imprints stamped by their seal.

IV.

There is, then, a system in human sentiments and ideas: and this system has for its motive power certain general traits, certain characteristics of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country. As in mineralogy the crystals, however diverse, spring from certain simple physical forms, so in history, civilisations, however diverse, are derived from certain simple spiritual forms. The one are explained by a primitive geometrical element, as the others are by a primitive psychological element. In order to master the classification of mineralogical systems, we must first consider a regular and general solid, its sides and angles, and observe in this the numberless transformations of which it is capable. So, if you would realise the system of historical varieties, consider first a human soul generally, with its two or three fundamental faculties, and in this compendium you will perceive the principal forms which it can present. After all, this kind of ideal picture, geometrical as well as psychological, is not very complex, and we speedily see the limits of the outline in which civilisations, like crystals, are constrained to exist.

Chief causes of thoughts and feelings. Their historical effects.

What is really the mental structure of man? Images or representations of things, which float within him, exist for a time, are effaced, and return again, after he has been looking upon a tree, an animal, any visible object. This is the subject-matter, the development whereof is double, either speculative or practical, according as the representations resolve themselves into a *general conception* or an *active resolution*. Here we have the whole of man in an abridgment; and in this limited circle human diversities meet, sometimes in the womb of the primordial matter, sometimes in the twofold

primordial development. However minute in their elements, they are enormous in the aggregate, and the least alteration in the factors produces vast alteration in the results. According as the representation is clear and as it were punched out or confused and faintly defined, according as it embraces a great or small number of the characteristics of the object, according as it is violent and accompanied by impulses, or quiet and surrounded by calm, all the operations and processes of the human machine are transformed. So, again, according as the ulterior development of the representation varies, the whole human development varies. If the general conception in which it results is a mere dry notation (in Chinese fashion), language becomes a sort of algebra, religion and poetry dwindle, philosophy is reduced to a kind of moral and practical common sense, science to a collection of utilitarian formulas, classifications, mnemonics, and the whole intellect takes a positive bent. If, on the contrary, the general representation in which the conception results is a poetical and figurative creation, a living symbol, as among the Aryan races, language becomes a sort of delicately-shaded and coloured epic poem, in which every word is a person, poetry and religion assume a magnificent and inexhaustible grandeur, metaphysics are widely and subtly developed, without regard to positive applications; the whole intellect, in spite of the inevitable deviations and shortcomings of its effort, is smitten with the beautiful and the sublime, and conceives an ideal capable by its nobleness and its harmony of rallying round it the tenderness and enthusiasm of the human race. If, again, the general conception in which the representation results is poetical but not graduated;

if man arrives at it not by an uninterrupted gradation, but by a quick intuition; if the original operation is not a regular development, but a violent explosion,—then, as with the Semitic races, metaphysics are absent, religion conceives God only as a king solitary and devouring, science cannot grow, the intellect is too rigid and unbending to reproduce the delicate operations of nature, poetry can give birth only to vehement and grandiose exclamations, language cannot unfold the web of argument and of eloquence, man is reduced to a lyric enthusiasm, an unchecked passion, a fanatical and limited action. In this interval between the particular representation and the universal conception are found the germs of the greatest human differences. Some races, as the classical, pass from the first to the second by a graduated scale of ideas, regularly arranged, and general by degrees; others, as the Germanic, traverse the same ground by leaps, without uniformity, after vague and prolonged groping. Some, like the Romans and English, halt at the first steps; others, like the Hindoos and Germans, mount to the last. If, again, after considering the passage from the representation to the idea, we consider that from the representation to the resolution, we find elementary differences of the like importance and the like order, according as the impression is sharp, as in southern climates, or dull, as in northern; according as it results in instant action, as among barbarians, or slowly, as in civilised nations; as it is capable or not of growth, inequality, persistence, and relations. The whole network of human passions, the chances of peace and public security, the sources of labour and action, spring from hence. Such is the case with all primordial differences: their issues embrace an entire civilisation;

and we may compare them to those algebraical formulas which, in a narrow limit, contain in advance the whole curve of which they form the law. Not that this law is always developed to its issue; there are perturbing forces; but when it is so, it is not that the law was false, but that it was not single. New elements become mingled with the old; great forces from without counteract the primitive. The race emigrates, like the Aryan, and the change of climate has altered in its case the whole economy, intelligence, and organisation of society. The people has been conquered, like the Saxon nation, and a new political structure has imposed on it customs, capacities, and inclinations which it had not. The nation has installed itself in the midst of a conquered people, downtrodden and threatening, like the ancient Spartans; and the necessity of living like troops in the field has violently distorted in an unique direction the whole moral and social constitution. In each case, the mechanism of human history is the same. We continually find, as the original mainspring, some very general disposition of mind and soul, innate and appended by nature to the race, or acquired and produced by some circumstance acting upon the race. These mainsprings, once admitted, produce their effect gradually: I mean that after some centuries they bring the nation into a new condition, religious, literary, social, economic; a new condition which, combined with their renewed effort, produces another condition, sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, and so forth; so that we may regard the whole progress of each distinct civilisation as the effect of a permanent force which, at every stage, varies its operation by modifying the circumstances of its action.

V.

Three different sources contribute to produce this elementary moral state — RACE, SURROUNDINGS, and EPOCH. What we call the race are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him into the world, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body. They vary with various peoples. There is a natural variety of men, as of oxen and horses, some brave and intelligent, some timid and dependent, some capable of superior conceptions and creations, some reduced to rudimentary ideas and inventions, some more specially fitted to special works, and gifted more richly with particular instincts, as we meet with species of dogs better favoured than others,—these for coursing, those for fighting, those for hunting, these again for house dogs or shepherds' dogs. We have here a distinct force,—so distinct, that amidst the vast deviations which the other two motive forces produce in him, one can recognise it still; and a race, like the old Aryans, scattered from the Ganges as far as the Hebrides, settled in every clime, and every stage of civilisation, transformed by thirty centuries of revolutions, nevertheless manifests in its languages, religions, literatures, philosophies, the community of blood and of intellect which to this day binds its offshoots together. Different as they are, their parentage is not obliterated; barbarism, culture and grafting, differences of sky and soil, fortunes good and bad, have laboured in vain: the great marks of the original model have remained, and we find again the two or three principal lineaments of the primitive stamp underneath the secondary imprints which time has laid upon them. There is nothing astonishing in this extra-

The three primordial forces. — RACE.

ordinary tenacity. Although the vastness of the distance lets us but half perceive—and by a doubtful light—the origin of species,[1] the events of history sufficiently illumine the events anterior to history, to explain the almost immovable steadfastness of the primordial marks. When we meet with them, fifteen, twenty, thirty centuries before our era, in an Aryan, an Egyptian, a Chinese, they represent the work of a great many ages, perhaps of several myriads of centuries. For as soon as an animal begins to exist, it has to reconcile itself with its surroundings; it breathes and renews itself, is differently affected according to the variations in air, food, temperature. Different climate and situation bring it various needs, and consequently a different course of activity; and this, again, a different set of habits; and still again, a different set of aptitudes and instincts. Man, forced to accommodate himself to circumstances, contracts a temperament and a character corresponding to them; and his character, like his temperament, is so much more stable, as the external impression is made upon him by more numerous repetitions, and is transmitted to his progeny by a more ancient descent. So that at any moment we may consider the character of a people as an abridgment of all its preceding actions and sensations; that is, as a quantity and as a weight, not infinite,[2] since everything in nature is finite, but disproportioned to the rest, and almost impossible to lift, since every moment of an almost infinite past has contributed to increase it, and because, in order to raise the scale, one must place in the opposite scale a still greater number of actions and sensations. Such is the

[1] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Prosper Lucas, *de l'Hérédité*.
[2] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part iv. axiom.

first and richest source of these master-faculties from which historical events take their rise; and one sees at the outset, that if it be powerful, it is because this is no simple spring, but a kind of lake, a deep reservoir wherein other springs have, for a multitude of centuries, discharged their several streams.

Having thus outlined the interior structure of a race, we must consider the surroundings in which it exists. For man is not alone in the world; nature surrounds him, and his fellow-men surround him; accidental and secondary tendencies overlay his primitive tendencies, and physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge. Sometimes the climate has had its effect. Though we can follow but obscurely the Aryan peoples from their common fatherland to their final settlements, we can yet assert that the profound differences which are manifest between the German races on the one side, and the Greek and Latin on the other, arise for the most part from the difference between the countries in which they are settled: some in cold moist lands, deep in rugged marshy forests or on the shores of a wild ocean, beset by melancholy or violent sensations, prone to drunkenness and gluttony, bent on a fighting, blood-spilling life; others, again, within the loveliest landscapes, on a bright and pleasant sea-coast, enticed to navigation and commerce, exempt from gross cravings of the stomach, inclined from the beginning to social ways, to a settled organisation of the state, to feelings and dispositions such as develop the art of oratory, the talent for enjoyment, the inventions of science, letters, arts. Sometimes the state policy has been at work, as in the two Italian civilisations: the first wholly turned to action, conquest,

SURROUNDINGS.

government, legislation, on account of the original site of its city of refuge, its border-land emporium, its armed aristocracy, who, by importing and drilling strangers and conquered, created two hostile armies, having no escape from its internal discords and its greedy instincts but in systematic warfare; the other, shut out from unity and any great political ambition by the stability of its municipal character, the cosmopolitan position of its pope, and the military intervention of neighbouring nations, directed by the whole bent of its magnificent and harmonious genius towards the worship of pleasure and beauty. Sometimes the social conditions have impressed their mark, as eighteen centuries ago by Christianity, and twenty-five centuries ago by Buddhism, when around the Mediterranean, as well as in Hindostan, the extreme results of Aryan conquest and civilisation induced intolerable oppression, the subjugation of the individual, utter despair, the thought that the world was cursed, with the development of metaphysics and myth, so that man in this dungeon of misery, feeling his heart softened, begot the idea of abnegation, charity, tender love, gentleness, humility, brotherly love—there, in a notion of universal nothingness, here under the Fatherhood of God. Look around you upon the regulating instincts and faculties implanted in a race—in short, the mood of intelligence in which it thinks and acts at the present time: you will discover most often the work of some one of these prolonged situations, these surrounding circumstances, persistent and gigantic pressures, brought to bear upon an aggregate of men who, singly and together, from generation to generation, are continually moulded and modelled by their action; in Spain, a crusade against the Mussulmans which lasted eight cen-

turies, protracted even beyond and until the exhaustion of the nation by the expulsion of the Moors, the spoliation of the Jews, the establishment of the Inquisition, the Catholic wars; in England, a political establishment of eight centuries, which keeps a man erect and respectful, in independence and obedience, and accustoms him to strive unitedly, under the authority of the law; in France, a Latin organisation, which, imposed first upon docile barbarians, then shattered in the universal crash, was reformed from within under a lurking conspiracy of the national instinct, was developed under hereditary kings, ends in a sort of levelling republic, centralised, administrative, under dynasties exposed to revolution. These are the most efficacious of the visible causes which mould the primitive man: they are to nations what education, career, condition, abode, are to individuals; and they seem to comprehend everything, since they comprehend all external powers which mould human matter, and by which the external acts on the internal.

There is yet a *third* rank of causes; for, with the forces within and without, there is the work which they have already produced together, and this work itself contributes to produce that which follows. Beside the permanent impulse and the given surroundings, there is the acquired momentum. When the national character and surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *tabula rasa*, but on a ground on which marks are already impressed. According as one takes the ground at one moment or another, the imprint is different; and this is the cause that the total effect is different. Consider, for instance, two epochs of a literature or art,—French tragedy under Corneille and under Vol-

Epochs.

taire, the Greek drama under Æschylus and under Euripides, Italian painting under da Vinci and under Guido. Truly, at either of these two extreme points the general idea has not changed; it is always the same human type which is its subject of representation or painting; the mould of verse, the structure of the drama, the form of body has endured. But among several differences there is this, that the one artist is the precursor, the other the successor; the first has no model, the second has; the first sees objects face to face, the second sees them through the first; that many great branches of art are lost, many details are perfected, that simplicity and grandeur of impression have diminished, pleasing and refined forms have increased,— in short, that the first work has influenced the second. Thus it is with a people as with a plant; the same sap, under the same temperature, and in the same soil, produces, at different steps of its progressive development, different formations, buds, flowers, fruits, seed-vessels, in such a manner that the one which follows must always be preceded by the former, and must spring up from its death. And if now you consider no longer a brief epoch, as our own time, but one of those wide intervals which embrace one or more centuries, like the middle ages, or our last classic age, the conclusion will be similar. A certain dominant idea has had sway; men, for two, for five hundred years, have taken to themselves a certain ideal model of man: in the middle ages, the knight and the monk; in our classic age, the courtier, the man who speaks well. This creative and universal idea is displayed over the whole field of action and thought; and after covering the world with its involuntarily systematic works, it has faded, it has died away,

and lo, a new idea springs up, destined to a like domination, and as manifold creations. And here remember that the second depends in part upon the first, and that the first, uniting its effect with those of national genius and surrounding circumstances, imposes on each new creation its bent and direction. The great historical currents are formed after this law—the long dominations of one intellectual pattern, or a master idea, such as the period of spontaneous creations called the Renaissance, or the period of oratorical models called the Classical Age, or the series of mystical systems called the Alexandrian and Christian eras, or the series of mythological efflorescences which we meet with in the infancy of the German people, of the Indian and the Greek. Here as elsewhere we have but a mechanical problem; the total effect is a result, depending entirely on the magnitude and direction of the producing causes. The only difference which separates these moral problems from physical ones is, that the magnitude and direction cannot be valued or computed in the first as in the second. If a need or a faculty is a quantity, capable of degrees, like a pressure or a weight, this quantity is not measurable like the pressure or the weight. We cannot define it in an exact or approximative formula; we cannot have more, or give more, in respect of it, than a literary impression; we are limited to marking and quoting the salient points by which it is manifested, and which indicate approximately and roughly the part of the scale which is its position. But though the means of notation are not the same in the moral and physical sciences, yet as in both the matter is the same, equally made up of forces, magnitudes, and directions, we may say that in both

History is a mechanical and psychological problem. Within certain limits man can foretell

the final result is produced after the same method. It is great or small, as the fundamental forces are great or small and act more or less exactly in the same sense, according as the distinct effects of race, circumstance, and epoch combine to add the one to the other, or to annul one another. Thus are explained the long impotences and the brilliant triumphs which make their appearance irregularly and without visible cause in the life of a people; they are caused by internal concords or contrarieties. There was such a concord when in the seventeenth century the sociable character and the conversational aptitude, innate in France, encountered the drawing-room manners and the epoch of oratorical analysis; when in the nineteenth century the profound and pliant genius of Germany encountered the age of philosophical systems and of cosmopolitan criticism. There was such a contrariety when in the seventeenth century the harsh and lonely English genius tried blunderingly to adopt a new-born politeness; when in the sixteenth century the lucid and prosaic French spirit tried vainly to bring forth a living poetry. That hidden concord of creative forces produced the finished urbanity and the noble and regular literature under Louis XIV. and Bossuet, the grand metaphysics and broad critical sympathy of Hegel and Goethe. That hidden contrariety of creative forces produced the imperfect literature, the scandalous comedy, the abortive drama under Dryden and Wycherley, the feeble Greek importations, the groping elaborate efforts, the scant half-graces under Ronsard and the Pleiad. So much we can say with confidence, that the unknown creations towards which the current of the centuries conducts us, will be raised up and regulated altogether by the three

primordial forces; that if these forces could be measured and computed, we might deduce from them as from a formula the characteristics of future civilisation; and that if, in spite of the evident crudeness of our notations, and the fundamental inexactness of our measures, we try now to form some idea of our general destiny, it is upon an examination of these forces that we must base our prophecy. For in enumerating them, we traverse the complete circle of the agencies; and when we have considered RACE, SURROUNDINGS, and EPOCH, which are the internal mainsprings, the external pressure, and the acquired momentum, we have exhausted not only the whole of the actual causes, but also the whole of the possible causes of motion.

VI.

Production of the results of a primordial cause. Common elements. Composition of groups. Law of mutual dependence. Law of proportional influences.

It remains for us to examine how these causes, when applied to a nation or an age, produce their results. As a spring, rising from a height and flowing downwards spreads its streams, according to the depth of the descent, stage after stage, until it reaches the lowest level of the soil, so the disposition of intellect or soul impressed on a people by race, circumstance, or epoch, spreads in different proportions and by regular descents, down the diverse orders of facts which make up its civilisation.[1] If we arrange the map of a country, starting from the watershed, we find that below this common point the streams are divided into five or six principal basins,

[1] For this scale of co-ordinate effects, consult Renan, *Langues Sémitiques*, ch. i.; Mommsen, *Comparison between the Greek and Roman Civilisations*, ch. ii. vol. i. 3d ed.; Tocqueville, *Conséquences de la Démocratie en Amérique*, vol. iii.

then each of these into several secondary basins, and so on, until the whole country with its thousand details is included in the ramifications of this network. So, if we arrange the psychological map of the events and sensations of a human civilisation, we find first of all five or six well-defined provinces—religion, art, philosophy, the state, the family, the industries; then in each of these provinces natural departments; and in each of these, smaller territories, until we arrive at the numberless details of life such as may be observed within and around us every day. If now we examine and compare these diverse groups of facts, we find first of all that they are made up of parts, and that all have parts in common. Let us take first the three chief works of human intelligence—religion, art, philosophy. What is a philosophy but a conception of nature and its primordial causes, under the form of abstractions and formulas? What is there at the bottom of a religion or of an art but a conception of this same nature and of these same causes under form of symbols more or less precise, and personages more or less marked; with this difference, that in the first we believe that they exist, in the second we believe that they do not exist? Let the reader consider a few of the great creations of the intelligence in India, Scandinavia, Persia, Rome, Greece, and he will see that, throughout, art is a kind of philosophy made sensible, religion a poem taken for true, philosophy an art and a religion dried up, and reduced to simple ideas. There is therefore, at the core of each of these three groups, a common element, the conception of the world and its principles; and if they differ among themselves, it is because each combines with the common, a distinct element: now the power of abstraction, again the power

to personify and to believe, and finally the power to personify and not believe. Let us now take the two chief works of human association, the family and the state. What forms the state but a sentiment of obedience, by which the many unite under the authority of a chief? And what forms the family but the sentiment of obedience by which wife and children act under the direction of a father and husband? The family is a natural state, primitive and restrained, as the state is an artificial family, ulterior and expanded; and underneath the differences arising from the number, origin, and condition of its members, we discover in the small society as in the great, a like disposition of the fundamental intelligence which assimilates and unites them. Now suppose that this element receives from circumstance, race, or epoch certain special marks, it is clear that all the groups into which it enters will be modified proportionately. If the sentiment of obedience is merely fear,[1] you will find, as in most Oriental states, a brutal despotism, exaggerated punishment, oppression of the subject, servility of manners, insecurity of property, impoverished production, the slavery of women, and the customs of the harem. If the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of order, sociality, and honour, you will find, as in France, a perfect military organisation, a fine administrative hierarchy, a want of public spirit with occasional jerks of patriotism, ready docility of the subject with a revolutionary impatience, the cringing courtier with the counter-efforts of the high-bred man, the refined pleasure of conversation and society on the one hand, and the worry at the fireside and among the family on the other, the equality of

[1] Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois, Principes des trois gouvernements.*

husband and wife, the imperfection of the married state, and consequently the necessary constraint of the law. If, again, the sentiment of obedience has its root in the instinct of subordination and the idea of duty, you will find, as among the Germans, security and happiness in the household, a solid basis of domestic life, a tardy and incomplete development of social and conversational life, an innate respect for established dignities, a superstitious reverence for the past, the keeping up of social inequalities, natural and habitual regard for the law. So in a race, according as the aptitude for general ideas varies, religion, art, and philosophy vary. If man is naturally inclined to the widest universal conceptions, and apt to disturb them at the same time by the nervous delicacy of his over-sensitive organisation, you will find, as in India, an astonishing abundance of gigantic religious creations, a glowing outgrowth of vast and transparent epic poems, a strange tangle of subtle and imaginative philosophies, all so well interwoven, and so penetrated with a common essence, as to be instantly recognised, by their breadth, their colouring, and their want of order, as the products of the same climate and the same intelligence. If, on the other hand, a man naturally staid and balanced in mind limits of his own accord the scope of his ideas, in order the better to define their form, you will find, as in Greece, a theology of artists and tale-tellers; distinctive gods, soon considered distinct from things, and transformed, almost at the outset, into recognised personages; the sentiment of universal unity all but effaced, and barely preserved in the vague notion of Destiny; a philosophy rather close and delicate than grand and systematic, with shortcomings in higher

metaphysics,[1] but incomparable for logic, sophistry, and morals; poetry and arts superior for clearness, artlessness, just proportions, truth, and beauty, to all that have ever been known. If, once more, man, reduced to narrow conceptions, and deprived of all speculative refinement, is at the same time altogether absorbed and straitened by practical occupations, you will find, as in Rome, rudimentary deities, mere hollow names, serving to designate the trivial details of agriculture, generation, household concerns, customs about marriage, rural life, producing a mythology, hence à philosophy, a poetry, either worth nothing or borrowed. Here, as everywhere, the law of mutual dependence[2] comes into play. A civilisation forms a body, and its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body. As in an animal, instincts, teeth, limbs, osseous structure, muscular envelope, are mutually connected, so that a change in one produces a corresponding change in the rest, and a clever naturalist can by a process of reasoning reconstruct out of a few fragments almost the whole body; even so in a civilisation, religion, philosophy, the organisation of the family, literature, the arts, make up a system in which every local change induces a general change, so that an experienced historian, studying some particular part of it, sees in advance and half predicts the character of the rest. There is nothing vague in this interdependence. In the living body the regulator

[1] The Alexandrian philosophy had its birth from the West. The metaphysical notions of Aristotle are isolated; moreover, with him as with Plato, they are but a sketch. By way of contrast consider the systematic vigour of Plotinus, Proclus, Schelling, and Hegel, or the wonderful boldness of Brahminical and Buddhistic speculation.

[2] I have endeavoured on several occasions to give expression to this law, notably in the preface to *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire.*

is, first, its tendency to manifest a certain primary type; then its necessity for organs whereby to satisfy its wants and to be in harmony with itself in order that it may live. In a civilisation, the regulator is the presence, in every great human creation, of a productive element, present also in other surrounding creations,—to wit, some faculty, aptitude, disposition, effective and discernible, which, being possessed of its proper character, introduces it into all the operations in which it assists, and, according to its variations, causes all the works in which it co-operates to vary also.

VII.

Law of formation of a group. Examples and indications.

At this point we can obtain a glimpse of the principal features of human transformations, and begin to search for the general laws which regulate, not events only, but classes of events, not such and such religion or literature, but a group of literatures or religions. If, for instance, it were admitted that a religion is a metaphysical poem, accompanied by belief; and remarking at the same time that there are certain epochs, races, and circumstances in which belief, the poetical and metaphysical faculty, show themselves with an unwonted vigour; if we consider that Christianity and Buddhism were produced at periods of high philosophical conceptions, and amid such miseries as raised up the fanatics of the Cévennes; if we recognise, on the other hand, that primitive religions are born at the awakening of human reason, during the richest blossoming of human imagination, at a time of the fairest artlessness and the greatest credulity; if we consider, also, that Mohammedanism appeared with the dawning of poetic prose, and the conception of national unity.

amongst a people destitute of science, at a period of sudden development of the intellect,—we might then conclude that a religion is born, declines, is reformed and transformed according as circumstances confirm and combine with more or less exactitude and force its three generative instincts; and we should understand why it is endemic in India, amidst imaginative, philosophic, eminently fanatic brains; why it blossomed forth so strangely and grandly in the middle ages, amidst an oppressive organisation, new tongues and literatures; why it was aroused in the sixteenth century with a new character and heroic enthusiasm, amid universal regeneration, and during the awakening of the German races; why it breaks out into eccentric sects amid the coarse American democracy, and under the bureaucratic Russian despotism; why, in short, it is spread, at the present day, over Europe in such different dimensions and such various characteristics, according to the differences of race and civilisation. And so for every kind of human production—for literature, music, the fine arts, philosophy, science, the state, industries, and the rest. Each of these has for its direct cause a moral disposition, or a combination of moral dispositions: the cause given, they appear; the cause withdrawn, they vanish: the weakness or intensity of the cause measures their weakness or intensity. They are bound up with their causes, as a physical phenomenon with its condition, as the dew with the fall of the variable temperature, as dilatation with heat. There are similarly connected data in the moral as in the physical world, as rigorously bound together, and as universally extended in the one as in the other. Whatever in the one case produces, alters, or suppresses the first term, produces, alters, or

suppresses the second as a necessary consequence. Whatever lowers the surrounding temperature, deposits the dew. Whatever develops credulity side by side with a poetical conception of the world, engenders religion. Thus phenomena have been produced; thus they will be produced. • As soon as we know the sufficient and necessary condition of one of these vast occurrences, our understanding grasps the future as well as the past. We can say with confidence in what circumstances it will reappear, foretell without presumption many portions of its future history, and sketch cautiously some features of its ulterior development.

VIII.

General problem and future of history. Psychological method. Value of literature. Purpose in writing this book.

History now attempts, or rather is very near attempting this method of research. The question propounded now-a-days is of this kind. Given a literature, philosophy, society, art, group of arts, what is the moral condition which produced it? what the conditions of race, epoch, circumstance, the most fitted to produce this moral condition? There is a distinct moral condition for each of these formations, and for each of their branches; one for art in general, one for each kind of art—for architecture, painting, sculpture, music, poetry; each has its special germ in the wide field of human psychology; each has its law, and it is by virtue of this law that we see it raised, by chance, as it seems, wholly alone, amid the miscarriage of its neighbours, like painting in Flanders and Holland in the seventeenth century, poetry in England in the sixteenth, music in Germany in the eighteenth. At this moment, and in these countries, the conditions have been fulfilled for one art, not for others, and a single branch

has budded in the general barrenness. History must search now-a-days for these rules of human growth; with the special psychology of each special formation it must occupy itself; the finished picture of these characteristic conditions it must now labour to compose. No task is more delicate or more difficult; Montesquieu tried it, but in his time history was too new to admit of his success; they had not yet even a suspicion of the road necessary to be travelled, and hardly now do we begin to catch sight of it. Just as in its elements astronomy is a mechanical and physiology a chemical problem, so history in its elements is a psychological problem. There is a particular system of inner impressions and operations which makes an artist, a believer, a musician, a painter, a man in a nomadic or social state; and of each the birth and growth, the energy, the connection of ideas and emotions, are different: each has his moral history and his special structure, with some governing disposition and some dominant feature. To explain each, it would be necessary to write a chapter of psychological analysis, and barely yet has such a method been rudely sketched. One man alone, Stendhal, with a peculiar bent of mind and a strange education, has undertaken it, and to this day the majority of readers find his books paradoxical and obscure: his talent and his ideas were premature; his admirable divinations were not understood, any more than his profound sayings thrown out cursorily, or the astonishing precision of his system and of his logic. It was not perceived that, under the exterior of a conversationalist and a man of the world, he explained the most complicated of esoteric mechanisms; that he laid his finger on the mainsprings; that he introduced into

the history of the heart scientific processes, the art of notation, decomposition, deduction; that he first marked the fundamental causes of nationality, climate, temperament; in short, that he treated sentiments as they should be treated,—in the manner of the naturalist, and of the natural philosopher, who classifies and weighs forces. For this very reason he was considered dry and eccentric: he remained solitary, writing novels, voyages, notes, for which he sought and obtained a score of readers. And yet we find in his books at the present day essays the most suitable to open the path which I have endeavoured to describe. No one has better taught us how to open our eyes and see, to see first the men that surround us and the life that is present, then the ancient and authentic documents, to read between the black and white lines of the pages, to recognise beneath the old impression, under the scribbling of a text, the precise sentiment, the movement of ideas, the state of mind in which they were written. In his writings, in Sainte-Beuve, in the German critics, the reader will see all the wealth that may be drawn from a literary work: when the work is rich, and people know how to interpret it, we find there the psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race. In this light, a great poem, a fine novel, the confessions of a superior man, are more instructive than a heap of historians with their histories. I would give fifty volumes of charters and a hundred volumes of state papers for the memoirs of Cellini, the epistles of St. Paul, the Table-talk of Luther, or the comedies of Aristophanes. In this consists the importance of literary works: they are instructive because they are beautiful: their utility grows

with their perfection; and if they furnish documents it is because they are monuments. The more a book brings sentiments into light, the more it is a work of literature; for the proper office of literature is to make sentiments visible. The more a book represents important sentiments, the higher is its place in literature; for it is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age, that a writer rallies round him the sympathies of an entire age and an entire nation. This is why, amid the writings which set before our eyes the sentiments of preceding generations, a literature, and notably a grand literature, is incomparably the best. It resembles those admirable apparatus of extraordinary sensibility, by which physicians disentangle and measure the most recondite and delicate changes of a body. Constitutions, religions, do not approach it in importance; the articles of a code of laws and of a creed only show us the spirit roughly and without delicacy. If there are any writings in which politics and dogma are full of life, it is in the eloquent discourses of the pulpit and the tribune, memoirs, unrestrained confessions; and all this belongs to literature: so that, in addition to itself, it has all the advantage of other works. It is then chiefly by the study of literatures that one may construct a moral history, and advance toward the knowledge of psychological laws, from which events spring.

I intend to write the history of a literature, and to seek in it for the psychology of a people: if I have chosen this nation in particular, it is not without a reason. I had to find a people with a grand and complete literature, and this is rare: there are few nations who have, during their whole existence, really thought

and written. Among the ancients, the Latin literature is worth nothing at the outset, then it borrowed and became imitative. Among the moderns, German literature does not exist for nearly two centuries.[1] Italian literature and Spanish literature end at the middle of the seventeenth century. Only ancient Greece, modern France and England, offer a complete series of great significant monuments. I have chosen England, because being still living, and subject to direct examination, it may be better studied than a destroyed civilisation, of which we retain but the relics, and because, being different from France, it has in the eyes of a Frenchman a more distinct character. Besides, there is a peculiarity in this civilisation, that apart from its spontaneous development, it presents a forced deviation, it has suffered the last and most effectual of all conquests, and the three grounds whence it has sprung, race, climate, the Norman invasion, may be observed in its remains with perfect exactness; so that we may examine in this history the two most powerful moving springs of human transformation, natural bent and constraining force, and we may examine them without uncertainty or gap, in a series of authentic and unmutilated memorials.

I have endeavoured to define these primary springs, to exhibit their gradual effects, to explain how they have ended by bringing to light great political, religious, and literary works, and by developing the recondite mechanism whereby the Saxon barbarian has been transformed into the Englishman of to-day.

[1] From 1550 to 1750.

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

BOOK I.

THE SOURCE.

CHAPTER I.

The Saxons.

I.

As you coast the North Sea from the Scheldt to Jutland, you will mark in the first place that the characteristic feature is the want of slope; marsh, waste, shoal; the rivers hardly drag themselves along, swollen and sluggish, with long, black-looking waves; the flooding stream oozes over the banks, and appears further on in stagnant pools. In Holland the soil is but a sediment of mud; here and there only does the earth cover it with a crust, shallow and brittle, the mere alluvium of the river, which the river seems ever about to destroy. Thick clouds hover above, being fed by ceaseless exhalations. They lazily turn their violet flanks, grow black, suddenly descend in heavy showers; the vapour, like a furnace-smoke, crawls for ever on the horizon. Thus watered, plants multiply; in the angle between Jutland and the continent, in a fat muddy soil, "the verdure is as

fresh as that of England."[1] Immense forests covered the land even after the eleventh century. The sap of this humid country, thick and potent, circulates in man as in the plants; man's respiration, nutrition, sensations and habits affect also his faculties and his frame.

The land produced after this fashion has one enemy, to wit, the sea. Holland maintains its existence only by virtue of its dykes. In 1654 those in Jutland burst, and fifteen thousand of the inhabitants were swallowed up. One need only see the blast of the North swirl down upon the low level of the soil, wan and ominous:[2] the vast yellow sea dashes against the narrow belt of flat coast which seems incapable of a moment's resistance; the wind howls and bellows; the sea-mews cry; the poor little ships flee as fast as they can, bending almost to the gunwale, and endeavour to find a refuge in the mouth of the river, which seems as hostile as the sea. A sad and precarious existence, as it were face to face with a beast of prey. The Frisians, in their ancient laws, speak already of the league they have made against "the ferocious ocean." Even in a calm this sea is unsafe. "Before me rolleth a waste of water . . . and above me go rolling the storm-clouds, the formless dark grey daughters of air, which from the sea, in cloudy buckets scoop up the water, ever wearied lifting and lifting, and then pour it again in the sea, a mournful, wearisome

[1] Malte-Brun, iv. 398. Not counting bays, gulfs, and canals, the sixteenth part of the country is covered by water. The dialect of Jutland bears still a great resemblance to English.

[2] See Ruysdaal's painting in Mr. Baring's collection. Of the three Saxon islands, North Strandt, Busen, and Heligoland, North Strandt was inundated by the sea in 1300, 1483, 1532, 1615, and almost destroyed in 1634. Busen is a level plain, beaten by storms, which it has been found necessary to surround by a dyke. Heligoland was laid waste by the sea in 800, 1300, 1500, 1649, the last time so violently that only a portion of it remained.—Turner, *Hist. of Angl. Saxons*, 1852, i. 97.

business. Over the sea, flat on his face, lies the monstrous, terrible North wind, sighing and sinking his voice as in secret, like an old grumbler, for once in good humour, unto the ocean he talks, and he tells her wonderful stories."[1] Rain, wind, and surge leave room for naught but gloomy and melancholy thoughts. The very joy of the billows has in it an inexplicable restlessness and harshness. From Holland to Jutland, a string of small, deluged islands[2] bears witness to their ravages; the shifting sands which the tide drifts up obstruct and impede the banks and entrance of the rivers.[3] The first Roman fleet, a thousand sail, perished there; to this day ships wait a month or more in sight of port, tossed upon the great white waves, not daring to risk themselves in the shifting, winding channel, notorious for its wrecks. In winter a breastplate of ice covers the two streams; the sea drives back the frozen masses as they descend; they pile themselves with a crash upon the sandbanks, and sway to and fro; now and then you may see a vessel, seized as in a vice, split in two beneath their violence. Picture, in this foggy clime, amid hoar-frost and storm, in these marshes and forests, half-naked savages, a kind of wild beasts, fishers and hunters, but especially hunters of men; these are they, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, Frisians;[4] later on, Danes, who during the fifth and the ninth centuries, with their swords and battle-axes, took and kept the island of Britain.

[1] Heine, *The North Sea*, translated by Charles G. Leland. See Tacitus, *Ann.* book 2, for the impressions of the Romans, "truculentia cœli."

[2] Watten, Platen, Sande, Düneninseln.

[3] Nine or ten miles out, near Heligoland, are the nearest soundings of about fifty fathoms.

[4] Palgrave, *Saxon Commonwealth*, vol. i.

A rude and foggy land, like their own, except in the depth of its sea and the safety of its coasts, which one day will call up real fleets and mighty vessels; green England—the word rises to the lips and expresses all. Here also moisture pervades everything; even in summer the mist rises; even on clear days you perceive it fresh from the great sea-girdle, or rising from vast but ever slushy meadows, undulating with hill and dale, intersected with hedges to the limit of the horizon. Here and there a sunbeam strikes on the higher grasses with burning flash, and the splendour of the verdure dazzles and almost blinds you. The overflowing water straightens the flabby stems; they grow up, rank, weak, and filled with sap; a sap ever renewed, for the gray mists creep under a stratum of motionless vapour, and at distant intervals the rim of heaven is drenched by heavy showers. "There are yet commons as at the time of the Conquest, deserted, abandoned,[1] wild, covered with furze and thorny plants, with here and there a horse grazing in solitude. Joyless scene, unproductive soil![2] What a labour it has been to humanise it! What impression it must have made on the men of the South, the Romans of Cæsar! I thought, when I saw it, of the ancient Saxons, wanderers from West and North, who came to settle in this land of marsh and fogs, on the border of primeval forests, on the banks of these great muddy streams, which roll down their slime to meet the waves.[3] They must have lived as hunters and swineherds; growing, as before, brawny, fierce, gloomy.

[1] *Notes of a Journey in England.*

[2] Léonce de Lavergne, *De l'Agriculture anglaise.* "The soil is much worse than that of France."

[3] There are at least four rivers in England passing by the name of "Ouse," which is only another form of "ooze."—TR.

Take civilisation from this soil, and there will remain to the inhabitants only war, the chase, gluttony, drunkenness. Smiling love, sweet poetic dreams, art, refined and nimble thought, are for the happy shores of the Mediterranean. Here the barbarian, ill housed in his mud-hovel, who hears the rain pattering whole days among the oak leaves—what dreams can he have, gazing upon his mud-pools and his sombre sky?"

II.

Huge white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks; of a cold temperament, slow to love,[1] home-stayers, prone to brutal drunkenness: these are to this day the features which descent and climate preserve in the race, and these are what the Roman historians discovered in their former country. There is no living, in these lands, without abundance of solid food; bad weather keeps people at home; strong drinks are necessary to cheer them; the senses become blunted, the muscles are braced, the will vigorous. In every country the body of man is rooted deep into the soil of nature; and in this instance still deeper, because, being uncultivated, he is less removed from nature. In Germany, storm-beaten, in wretched boats of hide, amid the hardships and dangers of seafaring life, they were pre-eminently adapted for endurance and enterprise, inured to misfortune, scorners of danger. Pirates at first: of all

[1] Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum, passim:* Diem noctemque continuare potando, nulli probrum.—Sera juvenum Venus.—Totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt. Dargaud, *Voyage en Danemark.* "They take six meals per day, the first at five o'clock in the morning. One should see the faces and meals at Hamburg and at Amsterdam."

kinds of hunting the man-hunt is most profitable and most noble; they left the care of the land and flocks to the women and slaves; seafaring, war, and pillage[1] was their whole idea of a freeman's work. They dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; and having sacrificed in honour of their gods the tithe of their prisoners, and leaving behind them the red light of their burnings, went farther on to begin again. "Lord," says a certain litany, "deliver us from the fury of the Jutes." "Of all barbarians[2] these are strongest of body and heart, the most formidable,"—we may add, the most cruelly ferocious. When murder becomes a trade, it becomes a pleasure. About the eighth century, the final decay of the great Roman corpse which Charlemagne had tried to revive, and which was settling down into corruption, called them like vultures to the prey. Those who had remained in Denmark, with their brothers of Norway, fanatical pagans, incensed against the Christians, made a descent on all the surrounding coasts. Their sea-kings,[3] "who had never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof, who had never drained the ale-horn by an inhabited hearth," laughed at wind and storms, and sang: "The blast of the tempest aids our oars; the bellowing of heaven, the howling of the thunder, hurt us not; the hurricane is our servant, and drives us whither we wish to go." "We hewed with our swords," says a song attributed to Ragnar Lodbrog; "was it not like that hour when my bright bride I seated by me on the couch?" One of

[1] Bede, v. 10. Sidonius, viii. 6. Lingard, *Hist. of England*, 1854, i. chap. 2.

[2] Zozimos, iii. 147. Amm. Marcellinus, xxviii. 526.

[3] Aug. Thierry, *Hist. S. Edmundi*, vi. 441. See Ynglingasaga, and especially Egil's Saga.

them, at the monastery of Peterborough, kills with his own hand all the monks, to the number of eighty-four; others, having taken King Ælla, divided his ribs from the spine, drew his lungs out, and threw salt into his wounds. Harold Harefoot, having seized his rival Alfred, with six hundred men, had them maimed, blinded, hamstrung, scalped, or embowelled.[1] Torture and carnage, greed of danger, fury of destruction, obstinate and frenzied bravery of an over-strong temperament, the unchaining of the butcherly instincts,—such traits meet us at every step in the old Sagas. The daughter of the Danish Jarl, seeing Egil taking his seat near her, repels him with scorn, reproaching him with "seldom having provided the wolves with hot meat, with never having seen for the whole autumn a raven croaking over the carnage." But Egil seized her and pacified her by singing: "I have marched with my bloody sword, and the raven has followed me. Furiously we fought, the fire passed over the dwellings of men; we have sent to sleep in blood those who kept the gates." From such table-talk, and such maidenly tastes, we may judge of the rest.[2]

Behold them now in England, more settled and wealthier: do you expect to find them much changed? Changed it may be, but for the worse, like the Franks,

[1] Lingard, *Hist. of England*, i. 164, says, however, "Every tenth man out of the six hundred received his liberty, and of the rest a few were selected for slavery."—TR.

[2] Franks, Frisians, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders, are one and the same people. Their language, laws, religion, poetry, differ but little. The more northern continue longest in their primitive manners. Germany in the fourth and fifth centuries, Denmark and Norway in the seventh and eighth, Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, present the same condition, and the muniments of each country will fill up the gaps that exist in the history of the others.

like all barbarians who pass from action to enjoyment. They are more gluttonous, carving their hogs, filling themselves with flesh, swallowing down deep draughts of mead, ale, spiced wines, all the strong, coarse drinks which they can procure, and so they are cheered and stimulated. Add to this the pleasure of the fight. Not easily with such instincts can they attain to culture; to find a natural and ready culture, we must look amongst the sober and sprightly populations of the south. Here the sluggish and heavy[1] temperament remains long buried in a brutal life; people of the Latin race never at a first glance see in them aught but large gross beasts, clumsy and ridiculous when not dangerous and enraged. Up to the sixteenth century, says an old historian, the great body of the nation were little else than herdsmen, keepers of cattle and sheep; up to the end of the eighteenth drunkenness was the recreation of the higher ranks; it is still that of the lower; and all the refinement and softening influence of civilisation have not abolished amongst them the use of the rod and the fist. If the carnivorous, warlike, drinking savage, proof against the climate, still shows beneath the conventions of our modern society and the softness of our modern polish, imagine what he must have been when, landing with his band upon a wasted or desert country, and becoming for the first time a settler, he saw extending to the horizon the common pastures of the border country, and the great primitive forests which furnished stags for the chase and acorns for his pigs. The ancient histories tell us that they had a great and a coarse appetite.[2] Even at the time of the Conquest the custom of drinking to excess

[1] Tacitus, *De mor. Germ.* xxii. : Gens nec astuta nec callida.

[2] W. of Malmesbury. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 365.

was a common vice with men of the highest rank, and they passed in this way whole days and nights without intermission. Henry of Huntingdon, in the twelfth century, lamenting the ancient hospitality, says that the Norman kings provided their courtiers with only one meal a day, while the Saxon kings used to provide four. One day, when Athelstan went with his nobles to visit his relative Ethelfleda, the provision of mead was exhausted at the first salutation, owing to the copiousness of the draughts; but Dunstan, forecasting the extent of the royal appetite, had furnished the house, so that the cup-bearers, as is the custom at royal feasts, were able the whole day to serve it out in horns and other vessels, and the liquor was not found to be deficient. When the guests were satisfied, the harp passed from hand to hand, and the rude harmony of their deep voices swelled under the vaulted roof. The monasteries themselves in Edgard's time kept up games, songs, and dances till midnight. To shout, to drink, to gesticulate, to feel their veins heated and swollen with wine, to hear and see around them the riotous orgies, this was the first need of the Barbarians.[1] The heavy human brute gluts himself with sensations and with noise.

For such appetites there was a stronger food,—I mean blows and battle. In vain they attached themselves to the soil, became tillers of the ground, in distinct communities and distinct regions, shut up[2] in their march

[1] Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*, xxii. xxiii.

[2] Kemble, *Saxons in England*, 1849, i. 70, ii. 184. "The Acts of an Anglo-Saxon parliament are a series of treaties of peace between all the associations which make up the State; a continual revision and renewal of the alliances offensive and defensive of all the free men. They are universally mutual contracts for the maintenance of the frid or peace."

with their kindred and comrades, bound together, separated from the mass, enclosed by sacred landmarks, by primeval oaks on which they cut the figures of birds and beasts, by poles set up in the midst of the marsh, which whosoever removed was punished with cruel tortures. In vain these Marches and Ga's[1] were grouped into states, and finally formed a half-regulated society, with assemblies and laws, under the lead of a single king; its very structure indicates the necessities to supply which it was created. They united in order to maintain peace; treaties of peace occupy their Parliaments; provisions for peace are the matter of their laws. War was waged daily and everywhere; the aim of life was, not to be slain, ransomed, mutilated, pillaged, hung and of course, if it was a woman, violated.[2] Every man was obliged to appear armed, and to be ready, with his burgh or his township, to repel marauders, who went about in bands.[3] The animal was yet too powerful, too impetuous, too untamed. Anger and covetousness in the first place brought him upon his prey. Their history, I mean that of the Heptarchy, is like a history of "kites and crows."[4] They slew the Britons or reduced them to slavery, fought the remnant of the Welsh, Irish, and Picts, massacred one another, were hewn down and cut to pieces by the Danes. In a hundred years, out of fourteen kings of Northumbria,

[1] A large district; the word is still existing in German, as Rheingau, Breisgau.—TR.

[2] Turner, *Hist. of the Anglo-Sax.* ii. 440, Laws of Ina.

[3] Such a band consisted of thirty-five men or more.

[4] Milton's expression. Lingard's *History*, i. chap. 3. This history bears much resemblance to that of the Franks in Gaul. See Gregory of Tours. The Saxons, like the Franks, somewhat softened, but rather degenerated, were pillaged and massacred by those of their northern brothers who still remained in a savage state.

seven were slain and six deposed. Penda of Mercia killed five kings, and in order to take the town of Bamborough, demolished all the neighbouring villages, heaped their ruins into an immense pile, sufficient to burn all the inhabitants, undertook to exterminate the Northumbrians, and perished himself by the sword at the age of eighty. Many amongst them were put to death by the thanes; one thane was burned alive; brothers slew one another treacherously. With us civilisation has interposed, between the desire and its fulfilment, the counteracting and softening preventive of reflection and calculation; here, the impulse is sudden, and murder and every kind of excess spring from it instantaneously. King Edwy[1] having married Elgiva, his relation within the prohibited degrees, quitted the hall where he was drinking on the very day of his coronation, to be with her. The nobles thought themselves insulted, and immediately Abbot Dunstan went himself to seek the young man. "He found the adulteress," says the monk Osbern, "her mother, and the king together on the bed of debauch. He dragged the king thence violently, and setting the crown upon his head, brought him back to the nobles." Afterwards Elgiva sent men to put out Dunstan's eyes, and then, in a revolt, saved herself and the king by hiding in the country; but the men of the North having seized her, "hamstrung her, and then subjected her to the death which she deserved."[2] Barbarity follows barbarity. At Bristol, at the time of the Conquest, as we are told by an historian of the time,[3] it was

[1] Vita S. Dunstani, *Anglia Sacra*, ii.

[2] It is amusing to compare the story of Edwy and Elgiva in Turner, ii. 216, etc., and then in Lingard, i. 132, etc. The first accuses Dunstan, the other defends him.—TR.

[3] *Life of Bishop Wolstan.*

the custom to buy men and women in all parts of England, and to carry them to Ireland for sale in order to make money. The buyers usually made the young women pregnant, and took them to market in that condition, in order to ensure a better price. "You might have seen with sorrow long files of young people of both sexes and of the greatest beauty, bound with ropes, and daily exposed for sale. . . . They sold in this manner as slaves their nearest relatives, and even their own children." And the chronicler adds that, having abandoned this practice, they "thus set an example to all the rest of England." Would you know the manners of the highest ranks, in the family of the last king?[1] At a feast in the king's hall, Harold was serving Edward the Confessor with wine, when Tostig, his brother, moved by envy, seized him by the hair. They were separated. Tostig went to Hereford, where Harold had ordered a royal banquet to be prepared. There he seized his brother's attendants, and cutting off their heads and limbs, he placed them in the vessels of wine, ale, mead, and cider, and sent a message to the king: "If you go to your farm, you will find there plenty of salt meat, but you will do well to carry some more with you." Harold's other brother, Sweyn, had violated the abbess Elgiva, assassinated Beorn the thane, and being banished from the country, had turned pirate. When we regard their deeds of violence, their ferocity, their cannibal jests, we see that they were not far removed from the sea-kings, or from the followers of Odin, who

[1] Tantæ sævitiæ erant fratres illi quod, cum alicujus nitidam villam conspicerent, dominatorem de nocte interfici jubèrent, totamque progeniem illius possessionemque defuncti obtinerent. Turner, iii. 27. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 367

ate raw flesh, hung men as victims on the sacred trees of Upsala, and killed themselves to make sure of dying as they had lived; in blood. A score of times the old ferocious instinct reappears beneath the thin crust of Christianity. In the eleventh century, Siward,[1] the great Earl of Northumberland, was afflicted with a dysentery; and feeling his death near, exclaimed, "What a shame for me not to have been permitted to die in so many battles, and to end thus by a cow's death! At least put on my breastplate, gird on my sword, set my helmet on my head, my shield in my left hand, my battle-axe in my right, so that a stout warrior, like myself, may die as a warrior." They did as he bade, and thus died he honourably in his armour. They had made one step, and only one, from barbarism.

III.

Under this native barbarism there were noble dispositions, unknown to the Roman world, which were destined to produce a better people out of its ruins. In the first place, "a certain earnestness, which leads them out of frivolous sentiments to noble ones."[2] From their origin in Germany this is what we find them, severe in manners, with grave inclinations and a manly dignity. They live solitary, each one near the spring or the wood which has taken his fancy.[3] Even in villages the cottages were detached; they must have independence and free air. They had no taste for voluptuousness; love was tardy, education severe, their food simple; all the re-

[1] "Pene gigas statura," says the chronicler. H. of Huntingdon, vi. 367. Kemble, i. 393. Turner, ii. 318.

[2] Grimm, *Mythology*, 53, Preface.

[3] Tacitus, xx. xxiii. xi. xii. xiii. *et passim*. We may still see the traces of this taste in English dwellings.

creation they indulged in was the hunting of the aurochs, and a dance amongst naked swords. Violent intoxication and perilous wagers were their weakest points; they sought in preference not mild pleasures, but strong excitement. In everything, even in their rude and masculine instincts, they were men. Each in his own home, on his land and in his hut, was his own master, upright and free, in no wise restrained or shackled. If the commonweal received anything from him, it was because he gave it. He gave his vote in arms in all great conferences, passed judgment in the assembly, made alliances and wars on his own account, moved from place to place, showed activity and daring.[1] The modern Englishman existed entire in this Saxon. If he bends, it is because he is quite willing to bend; he is no less capable of self-denial than of independence; self-sacrifice is not uncommon, a man cares not for his blood or his life. In Homer the warrior often gives way, and is not blamed if he flees. In the Sagas, in the Edda, he must be over-brave; in Germany the coward is drowned in the mud, under a hurdle. Through all outbreaks of primitive brutality gleams obscurely the grand idea of duty, which is, the self-constraint exercised in view of some noble end. Marriage was pure amongst them, chastity instinctive. Amongst the Saxons the adulterer was punished by death; the adulteress was obliged to hang herself, or was stabbed by the knives of her companions. The wives of the Cimbrians, when they could not obtain from Marius assurance of their chastity, slew themselves with their own hands. They thought there was something sacred in a woman; they married but one, and kept faith with her. In fifteen centuries the idea

[1] Tacitus, xiii.

of marriage is unchanged amongst them. The wife, on entering her husband's home, is aware that she gives herself altogether,[1] "that she will have but one body, one life with him; that she will have no thought, no desire beyond: that she will be the companion of his perils and labours; that she will suffer and dare as much as he, both in peace and war." And he, like her, knows that he gives himself. Having chosen his chief, he forgets himself in him, assigns to him his own glory, serves him to the death. "He is infamous as long as he lives, who returns from the field of battle without his chief."[2] It was on this voluntary subordination that feudal society was based. Man in this race, can accept a superior, can be capable of devotion and respect. Thrown back upon himself by the gloom and severity of his climate, he has discovered moral beauty, while others discover sensuous beauty. This kind of naked brute, who lies all day by his fireside, sluggish and dirty, always eating and drinking,[3] whose rusty faculties cannot follow the clear and fine outlines of happily created poetic forms, catches a glimpse of the sublime in his troubled dreams. He does not see it, but simply feels it; his religion is already within, as it will be in the sixteenth century, when he will cast off the sensuous worship imported from Rome, and hallow the faith of the heart.[4] His gods are not enclosed in walls; he has no idols. What he designates by divine names, is something invisible and grand, which floats through nature, and is conceived beyond

[1] Tacitus, xix. viii. xvi. Kemble, i. 232.

[2] Tacitus, xiv.

[3] "In omni domo, nudi et sordidi. . . . Plus per otium transigunt, dediti somno, ciboque; totos dies juxta focum atque ignem agunt."

[4] Grimm, 53, Preface. Tacitus, x.

nature,[1] a mysterious infinity which the sense cannot touch, but which "reverence alone can feel;" and when, later on, the legends define and alter this vague divination of natural powers, one idea remains at the bottom of this chaos of giant-dreams, namely, that the world is a warfare, and heroism the highest good.

In the beginning, say the old Icelandic legends,[2] there were two worlds, Niflheim the frozen, and Muspell the burning. From the falling snow-flakes was born the giant Ymir. "There was in times of old, where Ymir dwelt, nor sand nor sea, nor gelid waves; earth existed not, nor heaven above; 'twas a chaotic chasm, and grass nowhere." There was but Ymir, the horrible frozen Ocean, with his children, sprung from his feet and his armpits; then their shapeless progeny, Terrors of the abyss, barren Mountains, Whirlwinds of the North, and other malevolent beings, enemies of the sun and of life; then the cow Andhumbla, born also of melting snow, brings to light, whilst licking the hoar-frost from the rocks, a man Bur, whose grandsons kill the giant Ymir. "From his flesh the earth was formed, and from his bones the hills, the heaven from the skull of that ice-cold giant, and from his blood the sea; but of his brains the heavy clouds are all created." Then arose war between the monsters of winter and the luminous fertile gods, Odin the founder, Baldur the mild and

[1] "Deorum nominibus appellant secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident." Later on, at Upsala for instance, they had images (Adam of Bremen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*). Wuotan (Odin) signifies etymologically the All-Powerful, him who penetrates and circulates through everything (Grimm, *Mythol.*)

[2] *Sæmundar Edda, Snorra Edda*, ed. Copenhagen, three vols. *passim*. Mr. Bergmann has translated several of these poems into French, which Mr. Taine quotes. The translator has generally made use of the edition of Mr. Thorpe, London, 1866.

benevolent, Thor the summer-thunder, who purifies the air, and nourishes the earth with showers. Long fought the gods against the frozen Jötuns, against the dark bestial powers, the Wolf Fenrir, the great Serpent, whom they drown in the sea, the treacherous Loki, whom they bind to the rocks, beneath a viper whose venom drops continually on his face. Long will the heroes, who by a bloody death deserve to be placed "in the halls of Odin, and there wage a combat every day," assist the gods in their mighty war. A day will, however, arrive when gods and men will be conquered. Then

"trembles Yggdrasil's ash yet standing; groans that ancient tree, and the Jötun Loki is loosed. The shadows groan on the ways of Hel,[1] until the fire of Surt has consumed the tree. Hrym steers from the east, the waters rise, the mundane snake is coiled in jötun-rage. The worm beats the water, and the eagle screams; the pale of beak tears carcases; (the ship) Naglfar is loosed. Surt from the South comes with flickering flame; shines from his sword the Val-god's sun. The stony hills are dashed together, the giantesses totter; men tread the path of Hel, and heaven is cloven. The sun darkens, earth in ocean sinks, fall from heaven the bright stars, fire's breath assails the all-nourishing tree, towering fire plays against heaven itself."[2]

The gods perish, devoured one by one by the monsters; and the celestial legend, sad and grand now like the life of man, bears witness to the hearts of warriors and heroes.

There is no fear of pain, no care for life; they count it as dross when the idea has seized upon them. The

[1] Hel, the goddess of death, born of Loki and Angrboda.—Tr.

[2] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sæmund, The Vala's Prophecy*, str. 48-56, p. 9 *et passim*.

trembling of the nerves, the repugnance of animal instinct which starts back before wounds and death, are all lost in an irresistible determination. See how in their epic[1] the sublime springs up amid the horrible, like a bright purple flower amid a pool of blood. Sigurd has plunged his sword into the dragon Fafnir, and at that very moment they looked on one another; and Fafnir asks, as he dies, "Who art thou? and who is thy father? and what thy kin, that thou wert so hardy as to bear weapons against me?" "A hardy heart urged me on thereto, and a strong hand and this sharp sword. . . . Seldom hath hardy eld a faint-heart youth." After this triumphant eagle's cry Sigurd cuts out the worm's heart; but Regin, brother of Fafnir, drinks blood from the wound, and falls asleep. Sigurd, who was roasting the heart, raises his finger thoughtlessly to his lips. Forthwith he understands the language of the birds. The eagles scream above him in the branches. They warn him to mistrust Regin. Sigurd cuts off the latter's head, eats of Fafnir's heart, drinks his blood and his brother's. Amongst all these murders their courage and poetry grow. Sigurd has subdued Brynhild, the untamed maiden, by passing through the flaming fire; they share one couch for three nights, his naked sword betwixt them. "Nor the damsel did he kiss, nor did the Hunnish king to his arm lift her. He the blooming maid to Giuki's son delivered," because, according to his oath, he must send her to her betrothed Gunnar. She, setting her love upon

[1] *Fafnismâl Edda.* This epic is common to the Northern races, as is the *Iliad* to the Greek populations, and is found almost entire in Germany in the *Nibelungen Lied.* The translator has also used Magnusson and Morris' poetical version of the *Völsunga Saga*, and certain songs of the *Elder Edda*, London, 1870.

him, "Alone she sat without, at eve of day, began aloud with herself to speak: 'Sigurd must be mine; I must die, or that blooming youth clasp in my arms.'" But seeing him married, she brings about his death. "Laughed then Brynhild, Budli's daughter, once only, from her whole soul, when in her bed she listened to the loud lament of Giuki's daughter." She put on her golden corslet, pierced herself with the sword's point, and as a last request said:

"Let in the plain be raised a pile so spacious, that for us all like room may be; let them burn the Hun (Sigurd) on the one side of me, on the other side my household slaves, with collars splendid, two at our heads, and two hawks; let also lie between us both the keen-edged sword, as when we both one couch ascended; also five female thralls, eight male slaves of gentle birth fostered with me."[1]

All were burnt together; yet Gudrun the widow continued motionless by the corpse, and could not weep. The wives of the jarls came to console her, and each of them told her own sorrows, all the calamities of great devastations and the old life of barbarism.

"Then spoke Giaflang, Giuki's sister: 'Lo, up on earth I live most loveless, who of five mates must see the ending, of daughters twain and three sisters, of brethren eight, and abide behind lonely.' Then spake Herborg, Queen of Hunland: 'Crueller tale have I to tell of my seven sons, down in the Southlands, and the eight man, my mate, felled in the death-mead. Father and mother, and four brothers on the wide sea the winds and death played with; the billows beat on the bulwark boards. Alone must I sing o'er them, alone must I array them, alone must my hands deal with their departing; and all this was in

[1] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sæmund, Third lay of Sigurd Fafnicide*, str. 62-64, p. 83.

one season's wearing, and none was left for love or solace. Then was I bound a prey of the battle when that same season wore to its ending; as a tiring may must I bind the shoon of the duke's high dame, every day at dawning. From her jealous hate gat I heavy mocking, cruel lashes she laid upon me.'"[1]

All was in vain; no word could draw tears from those dry eyes. They were obliged to lay the bloody corpse before her, ere her tears would come. Then tears flowed through the pillow; as "the geese withal that were in the home-field, the fair fowls the may owned, fell a-screaming." She would have died, like Sigrun, on the corpse of him whom alone she had loved, if they had not deprived her of memory by a magic potion. Thus affected, she departs in order to marry Atli, king of the Huns; and yet she goes against her will, with gloomy forebodings: for murder begets murder; and her brothers, the murderers of Sigurd, having been drawn to Atli's court, fall in their turn into a snare like that which they had themselves laid. Then Gunnar was bound, and they tried to make him deliver up the treasure. He answers with a barbarian's laugh:

"'Högni's heart in my hand shall lie, cut bloody from the breast of the valiant chief, the king's son, with a dull-edged knife.' They the heart cut out from Hialli's breast; on a dish, bleeding, laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Then said Gunnar, lord of men: 'Here have I the heart of the timid Hialli, unlike the heart of the bold Högni; for much it trembles as in the dish it lies; it trembled more by half while in his breast it lay." Högni laughed when to his heart they cut the living crest-crasher; no lament uttered he. All bleeding on a dish they laid it, and it to Gunnar bare. Calmly said Gunnar, the warrior

[1] Magnusson and Morris, *Story of the Volsungs and Nibelungs, Lamentation of Gudrun*, p. 118 *et passim*.

Niflung: 'Here have I the heart of the bold Högni, unlike the heart of the timid Hialli; for it little trembles as in the dish it lies: it trembled less while in his breast it lay. So far shalt thou, Atli! be from the eyes of men as thou wilt from the treasures be. In my power alone is all the hidden Niflung's gold, now that Högni lives not. Ever was I wavering while we both lived; now am I so no longer, as I alone survive.'"[1]

It was the last insult of the self-confident man, who values neither his own life nor that of another, so that he can satiate his vengeance. They cast him into the serpent's den, and there he died, striking his harp with his foot. But the inextinguishable flame of vengeance passed from his heart to that of his sister. Corpse after corpse fall on each other; a mighty fury hurls them open-eyed to death. She killed the children she had by Atli, and one day on his return from the carnage, gave him their hearts to eat, served in honey, and laughed coldly as she told him on what he had fed. "Uproar was on the benches, portentous the cry of men, noise beneath the costly hangings. The children of the Huns wept; all wept save Gudrun, who never wept or for her bear-fierce brothers, or for her dear sons, young, simple."[2] Judge from this heap of ruin and carnage to what excess the will is strung. There were men amongst them, Berserkirs,[3] who in battle seized with a sort of madness, showed a sudden and superhuman strength, and ceased to feel their wounds. This is the conception of a hero as engendered by this race in its infancy. Is it not strange to see them place

[1] Thorpe, *The Edda of Sæmund, Lay of Atli*, str. 21-27, p. 117.

[2] *Ibid.* str. 38, p. 119.

[3] This word signifies men who fought without a breastplate, perhaps in shirts only; *Scottice*, "Baresarks."—TR.

their happiness in battle, their beauty in death? Is there any people, Hindoo, Persian, Greek, or Gallic, which has formed so tragic a conception of life? Is there any which has peopled its infantine mind with such gloomy dreams? Is there any which has so entirely banished from its dreams the sweetness of enjoyment, and the softness of pleasure? Endeavours, tenacious and mournful endeavours, an ecstasy of endeavours—such was their chosen condition. Carlyle said well, that in the sombre obstinacy of an English labourer still survives the tacit rage of the Scandinavian warrior. Strife for strife's sake—such is their pleasure. With what sadness, madness, destruction, such a disposition breaks its bonds, we shall see in Shakspeare and Byron; with what vigour and purpose it can limit and employ itself when possessed by moral ideas, we shall see in the case of the Puritans.

IV.

They have established themselves in England; and however disordered the society which binds them together, it is founded, as in Germany, on generous sentiment. War is at every door, I am aware, but warlike virtues are within every house; courage chiefly, then fidelity. Under the brute there is a free man, and a man of spirit. There is no man amongst them who, at his own risk,[1] will not make alliance, go forth to fight, undertake adventures. There is no group of free men amongst them, who, in their Witenagemote, is not for ever concluding alliances one with another. Every clan, in its own district, forms a league of which

[1] See the Life of Sweyn, of Hereward, etc., even up to the time of the Conquest.

all the members, "brothers of the sword," defend each other, and demand revenge for the spilling of blood, at the price of their own. Every chief in his hall reckons that he has friends, not mercenaries, in the faithful ones who drink his beer, and who, having received as marks of his esteem and confidence, bracelets, swords, and suits of armour, will cast themselves between him and danger on the day of battle.[1] Independence and boldness rage amongst this young nation with violence and excess; but these are of themselves noble things; and no less noble are the sentiments which serve them for discipline,—to wit, an affectionate devotion, and respect for plighted faith. These appear in their laws, and break forth in their poetry. Amongst them greatness of heart gives matter for imagination. Their characters are not selfish and shifty, like those of Homer. They are brave hearts, simple and strong, faithful to their relatives, to their master in arms, firm and steadfast to enemies and friends, abounding in courage, and ready for sacrifice. "Old as I am," says one, "I will not budge hence. I mean to die by my lord's side, near this man I have loved so much. He kept his word, the word he had given to his chief, to the distributor of gifts, promising him that they should return to the town, safe and sound to their homes, or that they would fall both together, in the thick of the carnage, covered with wounds. He lies by his master's side, like a faithful servant." Though awkward in speech, their old poets find touching words when they have to paint these manly friendships. We cannot without emotion hear them relate how the old "king embraced the best of his thanes, and put his arms about his neck, how the tears flowed down the cheeks of the

[1] Beowulf, *passim*, Death of Byrhtnoth.

greyhaired chief. . . . The valiant man was so dear to him. He could not stop the flood which mounted from his breast. In his heart, deep in the chords of his soul, he sighed in secret after the beloved man." Few as are the songs which remain to us, they return to this subject again and again. The wanderer in a reverie dreams about his lord:[1] It seems to him in his spirit as if he kisses and embraces him, and lays head and hands upon his knees, as oft before in the olden time, when he rejoiced in his gifts. Then he wakes—a man without friends. He sees before him the desert tracks, the seabirds dipping in the waves, stretching wide their wings, the frost and the snow, mingled with falling hail. Then his heart's wounds press more heavily. The exile says:—

"In blithe habits full oft we, too, agreed that nought else should divide us except death alone; at length this is changed, and as if it had never been is now our friendship. To endure enmities man orders me to dwell in the bowers of the forest, under the oak tree in this earthy cave. Cold is this earth-dwelling: I am quite wearied out. Dim are the dells, high up are the mountains, a bitter city of twigs, with briars overgrown, a joyless abode. . . . My friends are in the earth; those loved in life, the tomb holds them. The grave is guarding, while I above alone am going. Under the oak-tree, beyond this earth-cave, there I must sit the long summer-day."

Amid their perilous mode of life, and the perpetual appeal to arms, there exists no sentiment more warm than friendship, nor any virtue stronger than loyalty.

Thus supported by powerful affection and trysted word, society is kept wholesome. Marriage is like the

[1] *The Wanderer, the Exile's Song, Codex Exoniensis*, published by Thorpe.

state. We find women associating with the men, at their feasts, sober and respected.[1] She speaks, and they listen to her; no need for concealing or enslaving her, in order to restrain or retain her. She is a person, and not a thing. The law demands her consent to marriage, surrounds her with guarantees, accords her protection. She can inherit, possess, bequeath, appear in courts of justice, in county assemblies, in the great congress of the elders. Frequently the name of the queen and of several other ladies is inscribed in the proceedings of the Witenagemote. Law and tradition maintain her integrity, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. Her affections captivate her, as if she were a man, and side by side with men. In Alfred[2] there is a portrait of the wife, which for purity and elevation equals all that we can devise with our modern refinements. "Thy wife now lives for thee—for thee alone. She has enough of all kind of wealth for this present life, but she scorns them all for thy sake alone. She has forsaken them all, because she had not thee with them. Thy absence makes her think that all she possesses is nought. Thus, for love of thee, she is wasted away, and lies near death for tears and grief." Already, in the legends of the *Edda*, we have seen the maiden Sigrun at the tomb of Helgi, "as glad as the voracious hawks of Odin, when they of slaughter know, of warm prey," desiring to sleep still in the arms of death, and die at last on his grave. Nothing here like the love we find in the primitive poetry of France, Provence, Spain, and Greece. There is an absence of gaiety, of delight;

[1] Turner, *Hist. Angl. Sax.* iii. 63.

[2] Alfred borrows his portrait from Boethius, but almost entirely rewrites it.

outside of marriage it is only a ferocious appetite, an outbreak of the instinct of the beast. It appears nowhere with its charm and its smile; there is no love song in this ancient poetry. The reason is, that with them love is not an amusement and a pleasure, but a promise and a devotion. All is grave, even sombre, in civil relations as well as in conjugal society. As in Germany, amid the sadness of a melancholic temperament and the savagery of a barbarous life, the most tragic human faculties, the deep power of love and the grand power of will, are the only ones that sway and act.

This is why the hero, as in Germany, is truly heroic. Let us speak of him at length; we possess one of their poems, that of Beowulf, almost entire. Here are the stories, which the Thanes, seated on their stools, by the light of their torches, listened to as they drank the ale of their king: we can glean thence their manners and sentiments, as in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* those of the Greeks. Beowulf is a hero, a knight-errant before the days of chivalry, as the leaders of the German bands were feudal chiefs before the institution of feudalism.[1] He has "rowed upon the sea, his naked sword hard in his hand, amidst the fierce waves and coldest of storms, and the rage of winter hurtled over the waves of the deep." The sea-monsters, "the many coloured foes, drew him to the bottom of the sea, and held him fast in their gripe." But he reached "the wretches with his point and with his war-bill." "The mighty sea-beast received the war-rush through his hands," and he slew nine Nicors

[1] Kemble thinks that the origin of this poem is very ancient, perhaps contemporary with the invasion of the Angles and Saxons, but that the version we possess is later than the seventh century.—Kemble's *Beowulf*, text and translation, 1833. The characters are Danish.

(sea-monsters). And now behold him, as he comes across the waves to succour the old King Hrothgar, who with his vassals sits afflicted in his great mead-hall, high and curved with pinnacles. For "a grim stranger, Grendel, a mighty haunter of the marshes," had entered his hall during the night, seized thirty of the thanes who were asleep, and returned in his war-craft with their carcasses; for twelve years the dreadful ogre, the beastly and greedy creature, father of Orks and Jötuns, devoured men and emptied the best of houses. Beowulf, the great warrior, offers to grapple with the fiend, and foe to foe contend for life, without the bearing of either sword or ample shield, for he has "learned also that the wretch for his cursed hide recketh not of weapons," asking only that if death takes him, they will bear forth his bloody corpse and bury it; mark his fen-dwelling, and send to Hygelác, his chief, the best of war-shrouds that guards his breast.

He is lying in the hall, "trusting in his proud strength; and when the mists of night arose, lo, Grendel comes, tears open the door," seized a sleeping warrior: "he tore him unawares, he bit his body, he drank the blood from the veins, he swallowed him with continual tearings." But Beowulf seized him in turn, and "raised himself upon his elbow."

"The lordly hall thundered, the ale was spilled . . . both were enraged; savage and strong warders; the house resounded; then was it a great wonder that the wine-hall withstood the beasts of war, that it fell not upon the earth, the fair palace; but it was thus fast. . . . The noise arose, new enough; a fearful terror fell on the North Danes, on each of those who from the wall heard the outcry, God's denier sing his dreadful

lay, his song of defeat, lament his wound.[1] . . . The foul wretch awaited the mortal wound; a mighty gash was evident upon his shoulder; the sinews sprung asunder, the junctures of the bones burst; success in war was given to Beowulf. Thence must Grendel fly sick unto death, among the refuges of the fens, to seek his joyless dwelling. He all the better knew that the end of his life, the number of his days was gone by."[2]

For he had left on the ground, "hand, arm, and shoulder;" and "in the lake of Nicors, where he was driven, the rough wave was boiling with blood, the foul spring of waves all mingled, hot with poison; the dyè, discoloured with death, bubbled with warlike gore." There remained a female monster, his mother, who like him "was doomed to inhabit the terror of waters, the cold streams," who came by night, and amidst drawn swords tore and devoured another man, Æschere, the king's best friend. A lamentation arose in the palace, and Beowulf offered himself again. They went to the den, a hidden land, the refuge of the wolf, near the windy promontories, where a mountain stream rusheth downwards under the darkness of the hills, a flood beneath the earth; the wood fast by its roots overshadoweth the water; there may one by night behold a marvel, fire upon the flood: the stepper over the heath, when wearied out by the hounds, sooner will give up his soul, his life upon the brink, than plunge therein to hide his head. Strange dragons and serpents swam there; "from time to time the horn sang a dirge, a terrible song." Beowulf plunged into the wave, descended, passed monsters who tore his coat of mail, to the ogress, the hateful manslayer, who, seizing him in her grasp, bore him off to her dwelling. A pale gleam

[1] Kemble's *Beowulf*, xi. p. 32. [2] *Ibid.* xii. p. 34.

shone brightly, and there, face to face, the good champion perceived

"the she-wolf of the abyss, the mighty sea-woman; he gave the war-onset with his battle-bill; he held not back the swing of the sword, so that on her head the ring-mail sang aloud a greedy war-song. . . . The beam of war would not bite. Then caught the prince of the War-Geáts Grendel's mother by the shoulder . . . twisted the homicide, so that she bent upon the floor. . . . She drew her knife broad, brown-edged (and tried to pierce), the twisted breast-net which protected his life. . . . Then saw he among the weapons a bill fortunate in victory, an old gigantic sword, doughty of edge, ready for use, the work of giants. He seized the belted hilt; the warrior of the Scyldings, fierce and savage whirled the ring-mail; despairing of life, he struck furiously, so that it grappled hard with her about her neck; it broke the bone-rings, the bill passed through all the doomed body; she sank upon the floor; the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed; the beam shone, light stood within, even as from heaven mildly shines the lamp of the firmament."[1]

Then he saw Grendel dead in a corner of the hall; and four of his companions, having with difficulty raised the monstrous head, bore it by the hair to the palace of the king.

That was his first labour; and the rest of his life was similar. When he had reigned fifty years on earth, a dragon, who had been robbed of his treasure, came from the hill and burned men and houses "with waves of fire." "Then did the refuge of earls command to make for him a variegated shield, all of iron: he knew well enough that a shield of wood could not help him, lindenwood opposed to fire. . . . The prince

[1] *Beowulf*, xxii. xxiii. p. 62 *et passim*.

of rings was then too proud to seek the wide flier with a troop, with a large company; he feared not for himself that battle, nor did he make any account of the dragon's war, his laboriousness and valour." And yet he was sad, and went unwillingly, for he was "fated to abide the end." Then "he was ware of a cavern, a mound under the earth, nigh to the sea wave, the clashing of waters, which cave was full within of embossed ornaments and wires. . . . Then the king, hard in war sat upon the promontory, whilst he, the prince of the Geáts, bade farewell to his household comrades. . . . I, the old guardian of my people, seek a feud." He "let words proceed from his breast,' the dragon came, vomiting fire; the blade bit not his body, and the king "suffered painfully, involved in fire." His comrades had "turned to the wood, to save their lives," all save Wiglaf, who "went through the fatal smoke," knowing well "that it was not the old custom" to abandon relation and prince, "that he alone . . . shall suffer distress, shall sink in battle." "The worm came furious, the foul insidious stranger, variegated with waves of fire, . . . hot and warlike fierce, he clutched the whole neck with bitter banes; he was bloodied with life-gore, the blood boiled in waves."[1] They, with their swords, carved the worm in the midst. Yet the wound of the king became burning and swelled; "he soon discovered that poison boiled in his breast within, and sat by the wall upon a stone"; "he looked upon the work of giants, how the eternal cavern held within stone arches fast upon pillars." Then he said—

"I have held this people fifty years; there was not any king of my neighbours, who dared to greet me with warriors, to oppress

[1] *Beowulf*, xxxiii.-xxxvi. p. 94 *et passim*.

me with terror. . . . I held mine own well, I sought not treacherous malice, nor swore unjustly many oaths; on account of all this, I, sick with mortal wounds, may have joy. . . . Now do thou go immediately to behold the hoard under the hoary stone, my dear Wiglaf. . . . Now, I have purchased with my death a hoard of treasures; it will be yet of advantage at the need of the people. . . . I give thanks . . . that I might before my dying day obtain such for my peoples . . . longer may I not here be."[1]

This is thorough and real generosity, not exaggerated and pretended, as it will be later on in the romantic imaginations of babbling clerics, mere composers of adventure. Fiction as yet is not far removed from fact: the man breathes manifest beneath the hero. Rude as the poetry is, its hero is grand; he is so, simply by his deeds. Faithful, first to his prince, then to his people, he went alone, in a strange land, to venture himself for the delivery of his fellow-men; he forgets himself in death, while thinking only that it profits others. "Each one of us," he says in one place, "must abide the end of his present life." Let, therefore, each do justice, if he can, before his death. Compare with him the monsters whom he destroys, the last traditions of the ancient wars against inferior races, and of the primitive religion; think of his life of danger, nights upon the waves, man grappling with the brute creation; man's indomitable will crushing the breasts of beasts; man's powerful muscles which, when exerted, tear the flesh of the monsters: you will see reappear through the mist of legends, and under the light of poetry, the valiant men who, amid the madness of war and the raging of their own mood, began to settle a people and to found a state.

[1] *Beowulf*, xxxvii. xxxviii. p. 110 *et passim*. I have throughout always used the very words of Kemble's translation.—Tr.

V.

One poem nearly whole and two or three fragments are all that remain of this lay-poetry of England. The rest of the pagan current, German and barbarian, was arrested or overwhelmed, first by the influx of the Christian religion, then by the conquest of the Norman-French. But what remains more than suffices to show the strange and powerful poetic genius of the race, and to exhibit beforehand the flower in the bud.

If there has ever been anywhere a deep and serious poetic sentiment, it is here. They do not speak, they sing, or rather they shout. Each little verse is an acclamation, which breaks forth like a growl; their strong breasts heave with a groan of anger or enthusiasm, and a vehement or indistinct phrase or expression rises suddenly, almost in spite of them, to their lips. There is no art, no natural talent, for describing singly and in order the different parts of an object or an event. The fifty rays of light which every phenomenon emits in succession to a regular and well-directed intellect, come to them at once in a glowing and confused mass, disabling them by their force and convergence. Listen to their genuine war-chants, unchecked and violent, as became their terrible voices. To this day, at this distance of time, separated as they are by manners, speech, ten centuries, we seem to hear them still:—

"The army goes forth: the birds sing, the cricket chirps, the war-weapons sound, the lance clangs against the shield. Now shineth the moon, wandering under the sky. Now arise deeds of woe, which the enmity of this people prepares to do. . . . Then in the court came the tumult of war-carnage. They seized with their hands the hollow wood of the shield. They smote through the bones of the head. The roofs of the castle resounded,

until Garulf fell in battle, the first of earth-dwelling men, son of Guthlaf. Around him lay many brave men dying. The raven whirled about, dark and sombre, like a willow leaf. There was a sparkling of blades, as if all Finsburg were on fire. Never have I heard of a more worthy battle in war."[1]

This is the song on Athelstan's victory at Brunanburh:

"Here Athelstan king, of earls the lord, the giver of the bracelets of the nobles, and his brother also, Edmund the æthel-ing, the Elder a lasting glory won by slaughter in battle, with the edges of swords, at Brunanburh. The wall of shields they cleaved, they hewed the noble banners: with the rest of the family, the children of Edward. . . . Pursuing, they destroyed the Scottish people and the ship-fleet. . . . The field was coloured with the warrior's blood! After that the sun on high, . . . the greatest star! glided over the earth, God's candle bright! till the noble creature hastened to her setting. There lay soldiers many with darts struck down, Northern men over their shields shot. So were the Scots; weary of ruddy battle. . . . The screamers of war they left behind; the raven to enjoy, the dismal kite, and the black raven with horned beak, and the hoarse toad; the eagle, afterwards to feast on the white flesh; the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf in the wood."[2]

Here all is imagery. In their impassioned minds events are not bald, with the dry propriety of an exact description; each fits in with its pomp of sound, shape, colouring; it is almost a vision which is raised, complete, with its accompanying emotions, joy, fury, excitement. In their speech, arrows are "the serpents of Hel, shot from bows of horn;" ships are "great sea-

[1] Conybeare's *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 1826, *Battle of Finsborough*, p. 175. The complete collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry has been published by M. Grein.

[2] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii., book 9, ch. i. p. 245.

steeds," the sea is "a chalice of waves," the helmet is "the castle of the head:" they need an extraordinary speech to express their vehement sensations, so that after a time, in Iceland, where this kind of poetry was carried on to excess, the earlier inspiration failed, art replaced nature, the Skalds were reduced to a distorted and obscure jargon. But whatever be the imagery, here as in Iceland, though unique, it is too feeble. The poets have not satisfied their inner emotion if it is only expressed by a single word. Time after time they return to and repeat their idea. "The sun on high, the great star, God's brilliant candle, the noble creature!" Four times successively they employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes, and each word was like a fit of the semihallucination which possessed him. Verily, in such a condition, the regularity of speech and of ideas is disturbed at every turn. The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One colour induces another; from sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change: he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea. The more his mind is transported, the quicker and wider the intervals traversed. With one spring he visits the poles of his horizon, and touches in one moment objects which seemed to have the world between them. His ideas are entangled without order; without notice, abruptly, the poet will return to the idea he has quitted, and insert it in the thought to which he is giving expression. It is impossible to translate these incongruous ideas, which quite disconcert our modern style.

At times they are unintelligible.[1] Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of marking the connection of terms, of producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices, are neglected.[2] Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all. It rises and starts in little abrupt lines; it is the acme of barbarism. Homer's happy poetry is copiously developed, in full narrative, with rich and extended imagery. All the details of a complete picture are not too much for him; he loves to look at things, he lingers over them, rejoices in their beauty, dresses them in splendid words; he is like the Greek girls, who thought themselves ugly if they did not bedeck arms and shoulders with all the gold coins from their purse, and all the treasures from their caskets; his long verses flow by with their cadences, and spread out like a purple robe under an Ionian sun. Here the clumsy-fingered poet crowds and clashes his ideas in a narrow measure; if measure there be, he barely observes it; all his ornament is three words beginning with the same letter. His chief care is to abridge, to imprison thought in a kind of mutilated cry.[3] The force of the internal impression, which, not knowing how to unfold itself, becomes condensed and doubled by accumulation; the harshness of the outward expression, which, subservient

[1] The cleverest Anglo-Saxon scholars, Turner, Conybeare, Thorpe recognise this difficulty.

[2] Turner, iii. 231, *et passim*. The translations in French, however literal, do injustice to the text; that language is too clear, too logical. No Frenchman can understand this extraordinary phase of intellect, except by taking a dictionary, and deciphering some pages of Anglo-Saxon for a fortnight.

[3] Turner remarks that the same idea expressed by King Alfred, in prose and then in verse, takes in the first case seven words, in the second five.—*History of the Anglo-Saxons*, iii. 235.

to the energy and shocks of the inner sentiment, seeks only to exhibit it intact and original, in spite of and at the expense of all order and beauty,—such are the characteristics of their poetry, and these also will be the characteristics of the poetry which is to follow.

VI.

A race so constituted was predisposed to Christianity, by its gloom, its aversion to sensual and reckless living, its inclination for the serious and sublime. When their sedentary habits had reconciled their souls to a long period of ease, and weakened the fury which fed their sanguinary religion, they readily inclined to a new faith. The vague adoration of the great powers of nature, which eternally fight for mutual destruction, and, when destroyed, rise up again to the combat, had long since disappeared in the dim distance. Society, on its formation, introduced the idea of peace and the need for justice, and the war-gods faded from the minds of men, with the passions which had created them. A century and a half after the invasion by the Saxons,[1] Roman missionaries, bearing a silver cross with a picture of Christ, came in procession chanting a litany. Presently the high priest of the Northumbrians declared in presence of the nobles that the old gods were powerless, and confessed that formerly "he knew nothing of that which he adored;" and he among the first, lance in hand, assisted to demolish their temple. Then a chief rose in the assembly, and said:

"You remember, it may be, O king, that which sometimes happens in winter when you are seated at table with your earls and thanes. Your fire is lighted, and your hall warmed, and

[1] 596–625. Aug. Thierry, i. 81; Bede, xii. 2.

without is rain and snow and storm. Then comes a swallow flying across the hall; he enters by one door, and leaves by another. The brief moment while he is within is pleasant to him; he feels not rain nor cheerless winter weather; but the moment is brief—the bird flies away in the twinkling of an eye, and he passes from winter to winter. Such, methinks, is the life of man on earth, compared with the uncertain time beyond. It appears for a while; but what is the time which comes after—the time which was before? We know not. If, then, this new doctrine may teach us somewhat of greater certainty, it were well that we should regard it."

This restlessness, this feeling of the infinite and dark beyond, this sober, melancholy eloquence, were the harbingers of spiritual life.[1] We find nothing like it amongst the nations of the south, naturally pagan, and preoccupied with the present life. These utter barbarians embrace Christianity straightway, through sheer force of mood and clime. To no purpose are they brutal, heavy, shackled by infantine superstitions, capable, like King Canute, of buying for a hundred golden talents the arm of Augustine. They possess the idea of God. This grand God of the Bible, omnipotent and unique, who disappears almost entirely in the middle ages,[2] obscured by His court and His family, endures amongst them in spite of absurd or grotesque legends. They do not blot Him out under pious romances, by the elevation of the saints, or under feminine caresses, to benefit the infant Jesus and the Virgin. Their grandeur and their severity raise them to His high level; they are not tempted, like artistic and talkative nations, to replace religion by a fair and agreeable narrative. More than any race in Europe, they approach, by the

[1] Jouffroy, *Problem of Human Destiny.*

[2] Michelet, preface to *La Renaissance;* Didron, *Histoire de Dieu.*

simplicity and energy of their conceptions, the old Hebraic spirit. Enthusiasm is their natural condition; and their new Deity fills them with admiration, as their ancient deities inspired them with fury. They have hymns, genuine odes, which are but a concrete of exclamations. They have no development; they are incapable of restraining or explaining their passion; it bursts forth, in raptures, at the vision of the Almighty. The heart alone speaks here—a strong, barbarous heart. Cædmon, their old poet,[1] says Bede, was a more ignorant man than the others, who knew no poetry; so that in the hall, when they handed him the harp, he was obliged to withdraw, being unable to sing like his companions. Once, keeping night-watch over the stable, he fell asleep. A stranger appeared to him, and asked him to sing something, and these words came into his head: "Now we ought to praise the Lord of heaven, the power of the Creator, and His skill, the deeds of the Father of glory; how He, being eternal God, is the author of all marvels; who, almighty guardian of the human race, created first for the sons of men the heavens as the roof of their dwelling, and then the earth." Remembering this when he woke,[2] he came to the town, and they brought him before the learned men, before the abbess Hilda, who, when they had heard him, thought that he had received a gift from heaven, and made him a monk in the abbey. There he spent his life listening to portions of Holy Writ, which were explained to him in Saxon, "ruminating over them like a pure animal, turned them into most sweet verse." Thus is true poetry born. These men pray with all the emotion of a new soul; they kneel; they adore; the less they know the more they

[1] About 630. See *Codex Exoniensis*, Thorpe. [2] Bede, iv. 24.

think. Some one has said that the first and most sincere hymn is this one word O! Theirs were hardly longer; they only repeated time after time some deep passionate word, with monotonous vehemence. "In heaven art Thou, our aid and succour, resplendent with happiness! All things bow before thee, before the glory of Thy Spirit. With one voice they call upon Christ; they all cry: Holy, holy art thou, King of the angels of heaven, our Lord! and Thy judgments are just and great: they reign for ever and in all places, in the multitude of Thy works." We are reminded of the songs of the servants of Odin, tonsured now, and clad in the garments of monks. Their poetry is the same; they think of God, as of Odin, in a string of short, accumulated, passionate images, like a succession of lightning-flashes; the Christian hymns are a sequel to the pagan. One of them, Adhelm, stood on a bridge leading to the town where he lived, and repeated warlike and profane odes as well as religious poetry, in order to attract and instruct the men of his time. He could do it without changing his key. In one of them, a funeral song, Death speaks. It was one of the last Saxon compositions, containing a terrible Christianity, which seems at the same time to have sprung from the blackest depths of the Edda. The brief metre sounds abruptly, with measured stroke, like the passing bell. It is as if we hear the dull resounding responses which roll through the church, while the rain beats on the dim glass, and the broken clouds sail mournfully in the sky; and our eyes, glued to the pale face of a dead man, feel beforehand the horror of the damp grave into which the living are about to cast him.

"For thee was a house built ere thou wert born; for thee

was a mould shapen ere thou of thy mother camest. Its height is not determined, nor its depth measured; nor is it closed up (however long it may be) until I thee bring where thou shalt remain; until I shall measure thee and the sod of the earth. Thy house is not highly built; it is unhigh and low. When thou art in it, the heel-ways are low, the side-ways unhigh. The roof is built thy breast full nigh; so thou shalt in earth dwell full cold, dim, and dark. Doorless is that house, and dark it is within. There thou art fast detained, and Death holds the key. Loathly is that earth-house, and grim to dwell in. There thou shalt dwell, and worms shall share thee. Thus thou art laid, and leavest thy friends. Thou hast no friend that will come to thee, who will ever inquire how that house liketh thee, who shall ever open for thee the door, and seek thee, for soon thou becomest loathly and hateful to look upon."[1]

Has Jeremy Taylor a more gloomy picture? The two religious poetries, Christian and pagan, are so like, that one might mingle their incongruities, images, and legends. In Beowulf, altogether pagan, the Deity appears as Odin, more mighty and serene, and differs from the other only as a peaceful Bretwalda[2] differs from an adventurous and heroic bandit-chief. The Scandinavian monsters, Jötuns, enemies of the Æsir,[3] have not vanished; but they descend from Cain, and the giants drowned by the flood.[4] Their new hell is nearly the ancient Nástrand,[5] "a dwelling deadly cold, full of bloody eagles and pale adders;" and the dreadful last day of judg-

[1] Conybeare's *Illustrations*, p. 271.

[2] Bretwalda was a species of war-king, or temporary and elective chief of all the Saxons.—TR.

[3] The Æsir (sing. As) are the gods of the Scandinavian nations, of whom Odin was the chief.—TR.

[4] Kemble, i. i. xii. In this chapter he has collected many features which show the endurance of the ancient mythology.

[5] Nástrand is the strand or shore of the dead.—TR.

ment, when all will crumble into dust, and make way for a purer world, resembles the final destruction of *Edda*, that "twilight of the gods," which will end in a victorious regeneration, an everlasting joy "under a fairer sun."

By this natural conformity they were able to make their religious poems indeed poems. Power in spiritual productions arises only from the sincerity of personal and original sentiment. If they can relate religious tragedies, it is because their soul was tragic, and in a degree biblical. They introduce into their verses, like the old prophets of Israel, their fierce vehemence, their murderous hatreds, their fanaticism, all the shudderings of their flesh and blood. One of them, whose poem is mutilated, has related the history of Judith—with what inspiration we shall see. It needed a barbarian to display in such strong light excesses, tumult, murder, vengeance, and combat.

"Then was Holofernes exhilarated with wine; in the halls of his guests he laughed and shouted, he roared and dinned. Then might the children of men afar off hear how the stern one stormed and clamoured, animated and elated with wine. He admonished amply that they should bear it well to those sitting on the bench. So was the wicked one over all the day, the lord and his men, drunk with wine, the stern dispenser of wealth; till that they swimming lay over drunk, all his nobility, as they were death-slain."[1]

The night having arrived, he commands them to bring into his tent "the illustrious virgin;" then, going in to visit her, he falls drunk on his bed. The moment was come for "the maid of the Creator, the holy woman."

[1] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 271.

"She took the heathen man fast by his hair; she drew him by his limbs towards her disgracefully; and the mischief-ful odious man at her pleasure laid; so as the wretch she might the easiest well command. She with the twisted locks struck the hateful enemy, meditating hate, with the red sword, till she had half cut off his neck; so that he lay in a swoon, drunk and mortally wounded. He was not then dead, not entirely lifeless. She struck then earnest, the woman illustrious in strength, another time the heathen hound, till that his head rolled forth upon the floor. The foul one lay without a coffer; backward his spirit turned under the abyss, and there was plunged below, with sulphur fastened; for ever afterwards wounded by worms. Bound in torments, hard imprisoned, in hell he burns. After his course he need not hope, with darkness overwhelmed, that he may escape from that mansion of worms; but there he shall remain; ever and ever, without end, henceforth in that cavern-house, void of the joys of hope."[1]

Has any one ever heard a sterner accent of satisfied hate? When Clovis listened to the Passion play, he cried, "Why was I not there with my Franks!" So here the old warrior instinct swelled into flame over the Hebrew wars. As soon as Judith returned,

"Men under helms (went out) from the holy city at the dawn itself. They dinned shields; men roared loudly. At this rejoiced the lank wolf in the wood, and the wan raven, the fowl greedy of slaughter, both from the west, that the sons of men for them should have thought to prepare their fill on corpses. And to them flew in their paths the active devourer, the eagle, hoary in his feathers. The willowed kite, with his horned beak, sang the song of Hilda. The noble warriors proceeded, they in mail, to the battle, furnished with shields, with swelling banners. . . . They then speedily let fly forth showers of arrows, the serpents of Hilda, from their horn bows; the spears on the

[1] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 272.

ground hard stormed. Loud raged the plunderers of battle; they sent their darts into the throng of the chiefs. . . . They that awhile before the reproach of the foreigners, the taunts of the heathen endured."[1]

Amongst all these unknown poets[2] there is one whose name we know, Cædmon, perhaps the old Cædmon who wrote the first hymn; like him, at all events, who, paraphrasing the Bible with a barbarian's vigour and sublimity, has shown the grandeur and fury of the sentiment with which the men of these times entered into their new religion. He also sings when he speaks; when he mentions the ark, it is with a profusion of poetic names, "the floating house, the greatest of floating chambers, the wooden fortress, the moving roof, the cavern, the great sea-chest," and many more. Every time he thinks of it, he sees it with his mind, like a quick luminous vision, and each time under a new aspect, now undulating on the muddy waves, between two ridges of foam, now casting over the water its enormous shadow, black and high like a castle, "now enclosing in its cavernous sides" the endless swarm of caged beasts. Like the others, he wrestles with God in his heart; triumphs like a warrior over destruction and victory; and in relating the death of Pharaoh, can hardly speak from anger, or see, because the blood mounts to his eyes:

"The folk was affrighted, the flood-dread seized on their sad souls; ocean wailed with death, the mountain heights were with blood besteamed, the sea foamed gore, crying was in the waves, the water full of weapons; a death-mist rose; the Egyptians were turned back; trembling they fled, they felt fear: would

[1] Turner, *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, iii. book 9, ch. 3, p. 274.
[2] Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsœchsischen poesie.*

that host gladly find their homes; their vaunt grew sadder: against them, as a cloud, rose the fell rolling of the waves; there came not any of that host to home, but from behind inclosed them fate with the wave. Where ways ere lay sea raged. Their might was merged, the streams stood, the storm rose high to heaven; the loudest army-cry the hostile uttered; the air above was thickened with dying voices. . . . Ocean raged, drew itself up on high, the storms rose, the corpses rolled." [1]

Is the song of the Exodus more abrupt, more vehement, or more savage? These men can speak of the creation like the Bible, because they speak of destruction like the Bible. They have only to look into their own hearts, in order to discover an emotion sufficiently strong to raise their souls to the height of their Creator. This emotion existed already in their pagan legends; and Cædmon, in order to recount the origin of things, has only to turn to the ancient dreams, such as have been preserved in the prophecies of the *Edda*.

"There had not here as yet, save cavern-shade, aught been; but this wide abyss stood deep and dim, strange to its Lord, idle and useless; on which looked with his eyes the King firm of mind, and beheld those places void of joys; saw the dark cloud lower in eternal night, swart under heaven, dark and waste, until this worldly creation through the word existed of the Glory-King. . . . The earth as yet was not green with grass; ocean cover'd, swart in eternal night, far and wide the dusky ways." [2]

In this manner will Milton hereafter speak, the descendant of the Hebrew seers, last of the Scandinavian seers, but assisted in the development of his thought by all the resources of Latin culture and

[1] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, 1832, xlvii. p. 206.

[2] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, ii. p. 7. A likeness exists between this song and corresponding portions of the *Edda*.

civilisation. And yet he will add nothing to the primitive sentiment. Religious instinct is not acquired; it belongs to the blood, and is inherited with it. So it is with other instincts; pride in the first place, indomitable self-conscious energy, which sets man in opposition to all domination, and inures him against all pain. Milton's Satan exists already in Cædmon's, as the picture exists in the sketch; because both have their model in the race; and Cædmon found his originals in the northern warriors, as Milton did in the Puritans:

"Why shall I for his favour serve, bend to him in such vassalage? I may be a god as he. Stand by me, strong associates, who will not fail me in the strife. Heroes stern of mood, they have chosen me for chief, renowned warriors! with such may one devise counsel, with such capture his adherents; they are my zealous friends, faithful in their thoughts; I may be their chieftain, sway in this realm; thus to me it seemeth not right that I in aught need cringe to God for any good; I will no longer be his vassal."[1]

He is overcome: shall he be subdued? He is cast into the place "where torment they suffer, burning heat intense, in midst of hell, fire and broad flames: so also the bitter seeks smoke and darkness;" will he repent? At first he is astonished, he despairs; but it is a hero's despair.

"This narrow place is most unlike that other that we ere knew,[2] high in heaven's kingdom, which my master bestow'd on me. . . . Oh, had I power of my hands, and might one season

[1] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, iv. p. 18.

[2] This is Milton's opening also. (See *Paradise Lost*, Book i. verse 242, etc.) One would think that he must have had some knowledge of Cædmon from the translation of Junius.

be without, be one winter's space, then with this host I—But around me lie iron bonds, presseth this cord of chain: I am powerless! me have so hard the clasps of hell, so firmly grasped! Here is a vast fire above and underneath, never did I see a loathlier landskip; the flame abateth not, hot over hell. Me hath the clasping of these rings, this hard-polish'd band, impeded in my course, debarr'd me from my way; my feet are bound, my hands manacled, . . . so that with aught I cannot from these limb-bonds escape."[1]

As there is nothing to be done against God, it is His new creature, man, whom he must attack. To him who has lost everything, vengeance is left; and if the conquered can enjoy this, he will find himself happy; "he will sleep softly, even under his chains."

VII.

Here the foreign culture ceased. Beyond Christianity it could not graft upon this barbarous stock any fruitful or living branch. All the circumstances which elsewhere mellowed the wild sap, failed here. The Saxons found Britain abandoned by the Romans; they had not yielded, like their brothers on the Continent, to the ascendency of a superior civilisation; they had not become mingled with the inhabitants of the land; they had always treated them like enemies or slaves, pursuing like wolves those who escaped to the mountains of the west, treating like beasts of burden those whom they had conquered with the land. While the Germans of Gaul, Italy, and Spain became Romans, the Saxons retained their language, their genius and manners, and created in Britain a Germany outside of Germany. A hundred and fifty years after the Saxon

[1] Thorpe, *Cædmon*, iv. p. 23.

invasion, the introduction of Christianity and the dawn of security attained by a society inclining to peace, gave birth to a kind of literature; and we meet with the venerable Bede, and later on, Alcuin, John Scotus Erigena, and some others, commentators, translators, teachers of barbarians, who tried not to originate but to compile, to pick out and explain from the great Greek and Latin encyclopædia something which might suit the men of their time. But the wars with the Danes came and crushed this humble plant, which, if left to itself, would have come to nothing.[1] When Alfred[2] the Deliverer became king, "there were very few ecclesiastics," he says, "on this side of the Humber, who could understand in English their own Latin prayers, or translate any Latin writing into English. On the other side of the Humber I think there were scarce any; there were so few that, in truth, I cannot remember a single man south of the Thames, when I took the kingdom, who was capable of it." He tried, like Charlemagne, to instruct his people, and turned into Saxon for their use several works, above all some moral books, as the *de Consolatione* of Boethius; but this very translation bears witness to the barbarism of his audience. He adapts the text in order to bring it down to their intelligence; the pretty verses of Boethius, somewhat pretentious, laboured, elegant, crowded with classical allusions of a refined and compact style worthy

[1] They themselves feel their impotence and decrepitude. Bede, dividing the history of the world into six periods, says that the fifth, which stretches from the return out of Babylon to the birth of Christ, is the senile period; the sixth is the present, *ætas decrepita, totius morte sæculi consummanda.*

[2] Died in 901; Adhelm died 709, Bede died 735, Alcuin lived under Charlemagne, Erigena under Charles the Bald (843–877).

of Seneca, become an artless, long drawn out and yet desultory prose, like a nurse's fairy tale, explaining everything, recommencing and breaking off its phrases, making ten turns about a single detail; so low was it necessary to stoop to the level of this new intelligence, which had never thought or known anything. Here follows the latin of Boethius, so affected, so pretty, with the English translation affixed:—

"Quondam funera conjugis
Vates Threicius gemens,
Postquam flebilibus modis
Silvas currere, mobiles
Amnes stare coegerat,
Junxitque intrepidum latus
Sævis cerva leonibus,
Nec visum timuit lepus
Jam cantu placidum canem;
Cum flagrantior intima
Fervor pectoris ureret,
Nec qui cuncta subegerant
Mulcerent dominum modi;
Immites superos querens,
Infernas adiit domos.
Illic blanda sonantibus
Chordis carmina temperans,
Quidquid præcipuis Deæ
Matris fontibus hauserat,
Quod luctus dabat impotens,
Quod luctum geminans amor,
Deflet Tartara commovens,
Et dulci veniam prece
Umbrarum dominos rogat.
Stupet tergeminus novo
Captus carmine janitor;

"It happened formerly that there was a harper in the country called Thrace, which was in Greece. The harper was inconceivably good. His name was Orpheus. He had a very excellent wife, called Eurydice. Then began men to say concerning the harper, that he could harp so that the wood moved, and the stones stirred themselves at the sound, and wild beasts would run thereto, and stand as if they were tame; so still, that though men or hounds pursued them, they shunned them not. Then said they, that the harper's wife should die, and her soul should be led to hell. Then should the harper become so sorrowful that he could not remain among the men, but frequented the wood, and sat on the mountains, both day and night, weeping and harping, so that the woods shook, and the rivers stood still, and no hart shunned any lion, nor

Quæ sontes agitant metu
Ultrices scelerum Deæ
Jam mœstæ lacrymis madent.
Non Ixionium caput
Velox præcipitat rota,
Et longa site perditus
Spernit flumina Tantalus.
Vultur dum satur est modis
Non traxit Tityi jecur.
Tandem, vincimur, arbiter
Umbrarum miserans ait.
Donemus comitem viro,
Emptam carmine conjugem.
Sed lex dona coerceat,
Nec, dum Tartara liquerit,
Fas sit lumina flectere.
Quis legem det amantibus!
Major lex fit amor sibi.
Heu! noctis prope terminos
Orpheus Eurydicem suam
Vidit, perdidit, occidit.
Vos hæc fabula respicit,
Quicunque in superum diem
Mentem ducere quæritis.
Nam qui tartareum in specus
Victus lumina flexerit,
Quidquid præcipuum trahit
Perdit, dum videt inferos."

Book III. *Metre* 12.

hare any hound; nor did cattle know any hatred, or any fear of others, for the pleasure of the sound. Then it seemed to the harper that nothing in this world pleased him. Then thought he that he would seek the gods of hell, and endeavour to allure them with his harp, and pray that they would give him back his wife. When he came thither, then should there come towards him the dog of hell, whose name was Cerberus,—he should have three heads,—and began to wag his tail, and play with him for his harping. Then was there also a very horrible gatekeeper, whose name should be Charon. He had also three heads, and he was very old. Then began the harper to beseech him that he would protect him while he was there, and bring him thence again safe. Then did he promise that to him, because he was desirous of the unaccustomed sound. Then went he farther until he met the fierce goddesses, whom the common people call Parcæ, of whom they say, that they know no respect for any man, but punish every man according to his deeds; and of whom they say, that they control every man's fortune. Then began he to implore their mercy. Then began they to weep with him. Then went he farther, and all the inhabitants of hell ran towards him, and led him to their

king: and all began to speak with him, and to pray that which he prayed. And the restless wheel which Ixion, the king of the Lapithæ, was bound to for his guilt, that stood still for his harping. And Tantalus the king, who in this world was immoderately greedy, and whom that same vice of greediness followed there, he became quiet. And the vulture should cease, so that he tore not the liver of Tityus the king, which before therewith tormented him. And all the punishments of the inhabitants of hell were suspended, whilst he harped before the king. When he long and long had harped, then spoke the king of the inhabitants of hell, and said, Let us give the man his wife, for he has earned her by his harping. He then commanded him that he should well observe *that he never looked backwards* after he departed thence; and said, if he looked backwards, that he should lose the woman. But men can with great difficulty, if at all, restrain love! Wellaway! What! Orpheus then led his wife with him till he came to the boundary of light and darkness. Then went his wife after him. When he came forth into the light, then looked he behind his back towards the woman. Then was she immediately lost to him. This fable teaches every man who desires to fly the darkness of hell, and to come to the light of the true good, that he look not about him to his old vices, so that he practise them again as fully as he did before. For whosoever with full will turns his mind to the vices which he had before forsaken, and practises them, and they then fully please him, and he never thinks of forsaking them; then loses he all his former good unless he again amend it."[1]

A man speaks thus when he wishes to impress upon the mind of his hearers an idea which is not clear to them. Boethius had for his audience senators, men of culture, who understood as well as we the slightest mythological allusion. Alfred is obliged to take them

[1] Fox's *Alfred's Boethius*, chap. 35, § 6, 1864.

up and develop them, like a father or a master, who draws his little boy between his knees, and relates to him names, qualities, crimes and their punishments, which the Latin only hints at. But the ignorance is such that the teacher himself needs correction. He takes the Parcæ for the Erinyes, and gives Charon three heads like Cerberus. There is no adornment in his version; no delicacy as in the original. Alfred has hard work to make himself understood. What, for instance, becomes of the noble Platonic moral, the apt interpretation after the style of Iamblichus and Porphyry? It is altogether dulled. He has to call everything by its name, and turn the eyes of his people to tangible and visible things. It is a sermon suited to his audience of Thanes; the Danes whom he had converted by the sword needed a clear moral. If he had translated for them exactly the last words of Boethius, they would have opened wide their big stupid eyes and fallen asleep.

For the whole talent of an uncultivated mind lies in the force and oneness of its sensations. Beyond that it is powerless. The art of thinking and reasoning lies above it. These men lost all genius when they lost their fever-heat. They lisped awkwardly and heavily dry chronicles, a sort of historical almanacks. You might think them peasants, who, returning from their toil, came and scribbled with chalk on a smoky table the date of a year of scarcity, the price of corn, the changes in the weather, a death. Even so, side by side with the meagre Bible chronicles, which set down the successions of kings, and of Jewish massacres, are exhibited the exaltation of the psalms and the transports of prophecy. The same lyric poet can be alternately a brute and a genius, because

his genius comes and goes like a disease, and instead of having it he simply is ruled by it.

"A. D. 611. This year Cynegils succeeded to the government in Wessex, and held it one-and-thirty winters. Cynegils was the son of Ceol, Ceol of Cutha, Cutha of Cynric.

"614. This year Cynegils and Cnichelm fought at Bampton, and slew two thousand and forty-six of the Welsh.

"678. This year appeared the comet-star in August, and shone every morning during three months like a sunbeam. Bishop Wilfrid being driven from his bishopric by King Everth, two bishops were consecrated in his stead.

"901. This year died Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf, six nights before the mass of All Saints. He was king over all the English nation, except that part that was under the power of the Danes. He held the government one year and a half less than thirty winters; and then Edward his son took to the government.

"902. This year there was the great fight at the Holme, between the men of Kent and the Danes.

"1077. This year were reconciled the King of the Franks, and William, King of England. But it continued only a little while. This year was London burned, one night before the Assumption of St. Mary, so terribly as it never was before since it was built."[1]

It is thus the poor monks speak, with monotonous dryness, who after Alfred's time gather up and take note of great visible events; sparsely scattered we find a few moral reflections, a passionate emotion, nothing more. In the tenth century we see King Edgar give a manor to a bishop, on condition that he will put into Saxon the monastic regulation written in Latin by Saint Benedict. Alfred himself was almost the last man of culture; he, like Charlemagne, became so only by dint of deter-

[1] All these extracts are taken from Ingram's *Saxon Chronicle*, 1823.

mination and patience. In vain the great spirits of this age endeavour to link themselves to the relics of the fine, ancient civilisation, and to raise themselves above the chaotic and muddy ignorance in which the others flounder. They rise almost alone, and on their death the rest sink again into the mire. It is the human beast that remains master; the mind cannot find a place amidst the outbursts and the desires of the flesh, gluttony and brute force. Even in the little circle where he moves, his labour comes to nought. The model which he proposed to himself oppresses and enchains him in a cramping imitation; he aspires but to be a good copyist; he produces a gathering of centos which he calls Latin verses; he applies himself to the discovery of expressions, sanctioned by good models; he succeeds only in elaborating an emphatic, spoiled Latin, bristling with incongruities. In place of ideas, the most profound amongst them serve up the defunct doctrines of defunct authors. They compile religious manuals and philosophical manuals from the Fathers. Erigena, the most learned, goes to the extent of reproducing the old complicated dreams of Alexandrian metaphysics. How far these speculations and reminiscences soar above the barbarous crowd which howls and bustles in the depths below, no words can express. There was a certain king of Kent in the seventh century who could not write. Imagine bachelors of theology discussing before an audience of waggoners, not Parisian waggoners, but such as survive in Auvergne or in the Vosges. Among these clerks, who think like studious scholars in accordance with their favourite authors, and are doubly separated from the world as scholars and monks, Alfred alone, by his position as a layman and a practical man, descends in

his Saxon translations and his Saxon verses to the common level; and we have seen that his effort, like that of Charlemagne, was fruitless. There was an impassable wall between the old learned literature and the present chaotic barbarism. Incapable, yet compelled, to fit into the ancient mould, they gave it a twist. Unable to reproduce ideas, they reproduced a metre. They tried to eclipse their rivals in versification by the refinement of their composition, and the prestige of a difficulty overcome. So, in our own colleges, the good scholars imitate the clever divisions and symmetry of Claudian rather than the ease and variety of Virgil. They put their feet in irons, and showed their smartness by running in shackles; they weighted themselves with rules of modern rhyme and rules of ancient metre; they added the necessity of beginning each verse with the same letter that began the last. A few, like Adhelm, wrote square acrostics, in which the first line, repeated at the end, was found also to the left and right of the piece. Thus made up of the first and last letters of each verse, it forms a border to the whole piece, and the morsel of verse is like a piece of tapestry. Strange literary tricks, which changed the poet into an artisan. They bear witness to the difficulties which then impeded culture and nature, and spoiled at once the Latin form and the Saxon genius.

Beyond this barrier, which drew an impassable line between civilisation and barbarism, there was another, no less impassable, between the Latin and Saxon genius. The strong German imagination, in which glowing and obscure visions suddenly meet and abruptly overflow, was in contrast with the reasoning spirit, in which ideas gather and are developed only in a regular order; so

that if the barbarian, in his classical attempts, retained any part of his primitive instincts, he succeeded only in producing a grotesque and frightful monster. One of them this very Adhelm, a relative of King Ina, who sang on the town-bridge profane and sacred hymns alternately, too much imbued with Saxon poesy, simply to imitate the antique models, adorned his Latin prose and verse with all the "English magnificence."[1] You might compare him to a barbarian who seizes a flute from the skilled hands of a player of Augustus' court, in order to blow on it with inflated lungs, as if it were the bellowing horn of an aurochs. The sober speech of the Roman orators and senators becomes in his hands full of exaggerated and incoherent images; he violently connects words, uniting them in a sudden and extravagant manner; he heaps up his colours, and utters extraordinary and unintelligible nonsense, like that of the later Skalds; in short, he is a latinised Skald, dragging into his new tongue the ornaments of Scandinavian poetry, such as alliteration, by dint of which he congregates in one of his epistles fifteen consecutive words, all beginning with the same letter; and in order to make up his fifteen, he introduces a barbarous Græcism amongst the Latin words.[2] Amongst the others, the writers of legends, you will meet many times with deformation of Latin, distorted by the outburst of a too vivid imagination; it breaks out even in their scholastic and scientific writing. Here is part of a dialogue between Alcuin and prince Pepin, a son of Charlemagne,

[1] William of Malmesbury's expression.

[2] Primitus (pantorum procerum prætorumque pio potissimum paternoque præsertim privilegio) panegyricum poemataque passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes, stridula vocum symphonia ac melodiæ cantile, næque carmine modulaturi hymnizemus.

and he uses like formulas the little poetic and bold phrases which abound in the national poetry. "What is winter? the banishment of summer. What is spring? the painter of the earth. What is the year? the world's chariot. What is the sun? the splendour of the world, the beauty of heaven, the grace of nature, the honour of day, the distributor of the hours. What is the sea? the path of audacity, the boundary of the earth, the receptacle of the rivers, the fountain of showers." More, he ends his instructions with enigmas, in the spirit of the Skalds, such as we still find in the old manuscripts with the barbarian songs. It was the last feature of the national genius, which, when it labours to understand a matter, neglects dry, clear, consecutive deduction, to employ grotesque, remote, oft repeated imagery, and replaces analysis by intuition.

VIII.

Such was this race, the last born of the sister races, which, in the decay of the other two, the Latin and the Greek, brings to the world a new civilisation, with a new character and genius. Inferior to these in many respects, it surpasses them in not a few. Amidst the woods and mire and snows, under a sad, inclement sky, gross instincts have gained the day during this long barbarism. The German has not acquired gay humour, unreserved facility, the feeling for harmonious beauty; his great phlegmatic body continues savage and stiff, greedy and brutal; his rude and unpliable mind is still inclined to savagery, and restive under culture. Dull and congealed, his ideas cannot expand with facility and freedom, with a natural sequence and an instinctive regularity. But this spirit, void of the

sentiment of the beautiful, is all the more apt for the sentiment of the true. The deep and incisive impression which he receives from contact with objects, and which as yet he can only express by a cry, will afterwards liberate him from the Latin rhetoric, and will vent itself on things rather than on words. Moreover, under the constraint of climate and solitude, by the habit of resistance and effort, his ideal is changed. Manly and moral instincts have gained the empire over him; and amongst them the need of independence, the disposition for serious and strict manners, the inclination for devotion and veneration, the worship of heroism. Here are the foundations and the elements of a civilisation, slower but sounder, less careful of what is agreeable and elegant, more based on justice and truth.[1] Hitherto at least the race is intact, intact in its primitive coarseness; the Roman cultivation could neither develop nor deform it. If Christianity took root, it was owing to natural affinities, but it produced no change in the native genius. Now approaches a new conquest, which is to bring this time men, as well as ideas. The Saxons, meanwhile, after the wont of German races, vigorous and fertile, have within the past six centuries multiplied enormously. They were now about two millions, and the Norman army numbered sixty thousand.[2] In vain

[1] In Iceland, the country of the fiercest sea-kings, crimes are unknown; prisons have been turned to other uses; fines are the only punishment.

[2] Following Doomsday Book, Mr. Turner reckons at three hundred thousand the heads of families mentioned. If each family consisted of five persons, that would make one million five hundred thousand people. He adds five hundred thousand for the four northern counties, for London and several large towns, for the monks and provincial clergy not enumerated. . . . We must accept these figures with caution. Still

these Normans become transformed, gallicised; by their origin, and substantially in themselves they are still the relatives of those whom they conquered. In vain they imported their manners and their poesy, and introduced into the language a third part of its words; this language continues altogether German in element and in substance.[1] Though the grammar changed, it changed integrally, by an internal action, in the same sense as its continental cognates. At the end of three hundred years the conquerors themselves were conquered; their speech became English; and owing to frequent intermarriage, the English blood ended by gaining the predominance over the Norman blood in their veins. The race finally remains Saxon. If the old poetic genius disappears after the Conquest, it is as a river disappears, and flows for a while underground. In five centuries it will emerge once more.[1]

they agree with those of Mackintosh, George Chalmers, and several others. Many facts show that the Saxon population was very numerous, and quite out of proportion to the Norman population.

[1] Warton, *History of English Poetry*, 1840, 3 vols. preface.

CHAPTER II.

The Normans.

I.

A CENTURY and a half had passed on the Continent since, amid the universal decay and dissolution, a new society had been formed, and new men had risen up. Brave men had at length made a stand against the Norsemen and the robbers. They had planted their feet in the soil, and the moving chaos of the general subsidence had become fixed by the effort of their great hearts and of their arms. At the mouths of the rivers, in the defiles of the mountains, on the margin of the waste borders, at all perilous passes, they had built their forts, each for himself, each on his own land, each with his faithful band; and they had lived like a scattered but watchful army, encamped and confederate in their castles, sword in hand, in front of the enemy. Beneath this discipline a formidable people had been formed, fierce hearts in strong bodies,[1] intolerant of restraint,

[1] See, amidst other delineations of their manners, the first accounts of the first Crusade. Godfrey clove a Saracen down to his waist.—In Palestine, a widow was compelled, up to the age of sixty, to marry again, because no fief could remain without a defender.—A Spanish leader said to his exhausted soldiers after a battle, "You are too weary and too much wounded, but come and fight with me against this other band; the fresh wounds which we shall receive will make us forget those which we have." At this time, says the General Chronicle of Spain, kings counts, and nobles, and all the knights, that they might be ever ready, kept their horses in the chamber where they slept with their wives.

longing for violent deeds, born for constant warfare because steeped in permanent warfare, heroes and robbers, who, as an escape from their solitude, plunged into adventures, and went, that they might conquer a country or win Paradise, to Sicily, to Portugal, to Spain, to Livonia, to Palestine, to England.

II.

On the 27th of September 1066, at the mouth of the Somme, there was a great sight to be seen: four hundred large sailing vessels, more than a thousand transports, and sixty thousand men, were on the point of embarking.[1] The sun shone splendidly after long rain; trumpets sounded, the cries of this armed multitude rose to heaven; as far as the eye could see, on the shore, in the wide-spreading river on the sea which opens out thence broad and shining, masts and sails extended like a forest; the enormous fleet set out wafted by the south wind.[2] The people which it carried were said to have come from Norway, and they might have been taken for kinsmen of the Saxons, with whom they were to fight; but there were with them a multitude of adventurers, crowding from all quarters, far and near, from north and south, from Maine and Anjou, from Poitou and Brittany, from Ile-de-France and Flanders, from Aquitaine and Burgundy;[3] and, in short, the expedition itself was French.

[1] For difference in numbers of the fleet and men, see Freeman, *Hist. of the Norm. Conq.*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 381, 387.—TR.

[2] For all the details, see *Anglo-Norman Chronicles*, iii. 4, as quoted by Aug. Thierry. I have myself seen the locality and the country.

[3] Of three columns of attack at Hastings, two were composed of auxiliaries. Moreover, the chroniclers are not at fault upon this critical point; they agree in stating that England was conquered by Frenchmen.

How comes it that, having kept its name, it had changed its nature? and what series of renovations had made a Latin out of a German people? The reason is that this people, when they came to Neustria, were neither a national body, nor a pure race. They were but a band; and as such, marrying the women of the country, they introduced foreign blood into their children. They were a Scandinavian band, but swelled by all the bold knaves and all the wretched desperadoes who wandered about the conquered country:[1] and as such they received foreign blood into their veins. Moreover, if the nomadic band was mixed, the settled band was much more so; and peace by its transfusions, like war by its recruits, had changed the character of the primitive blood. When Rollo, having divided the land amongst his followers, hung the thieves and their abettors, people from every country gathered to him. Security, good stern justice, were so rare, that they were enough to re-people a land.[2] He invited strangers, say the old writers, "and made one people out of so many folk of different natures." This assemblage of barbarians, refugees, robbers, immigrants, spoke Romance or French so quickly, that the second Duke, wishing to have his son taught Danish, had to send him to Bayeux, where it was still spoken. The great masses always form the race in the end, and generally the genius and language. Thus this people, so transformed, quickly became polished; the composite race showed itself of a

[1] It was a Rouen fisherman, a soldier of Rollo, who killed the Duke of France at the mouth of the Eure. Hastings, the famous sea-king, was a labourer's son from the neighbourhood of Troyes.

[2] "In the tenth century," says Stendhal, "a man wished for two things: 1*st*, not to be slain; 2*d*, to have a good leather coat." See Fontenelle's *Chronicle*.

ready genius, far more wary than the Saxons across the Channel, closely resembling their neighbours of Picardy, Champagne, and Ile-de-France. "The Saxons," says an old writer,[1] "vied with each other in their drinking feats, and wasted their income by day and night in feasting, whilst they lived in wretched hovels; the French and Normans, on the other hand, living inexpensively in their fine large houses, were besides refined in their food and studiously careful in their dress." The former, still weighted by the German phlegm, were gluttons and drunkards, now and then aroused by poetical enthusiasm; the latter, made sprightlier by their transplantation and their alloy, felt the cravings of the mind already making themselves manifest. "You might see amongst them churches in every village, and monasteries in the cities, towering on high, and built in a style unknown before," first in Normandy, and later in England.[2] Taste had come to them at once—that is, the desire to please the eye, and to express a thought by outward representation, which was quite a new idea: the circular arch was raised on one or on a cluster of columns; elegant mouldings were placed about the windows; the rose window made its appearance, simple yet, like the flower which gives it its name "*rose des buissons*;" and the Norman style unfolded itself, original yet proportioned between the Gothic, whose richness it foreshadowed, and the Romance, whose solidity it recalled.

With taste, just as natural and just as quickly, was developed the spirit of inquiry. Nations are like

[1] William of Malmesbury.

[2] Churches in London, Sarum, Norwich, Durham, Chichester, Peterborough, Rochester, Hereford, Gloucester, Oxford, etc.—William of Malmesbury.

children; with some the tongue is readily loosened, and they comprehend at once; with others it is loosened with difficulty, and they are slow of comprehension. The men we are here speaking of had educated themselves nimbly, as Frenchmen do. They were the first in France who unravelled the language, regulating it and writing it so well, that to this day we understand their codes and their poems. In a century and a half they were so far cultivated as to find the Saxons "unlettered and rude."[1] That was the excuse they made for banishing them from the abbeys and all valuable ecclesiastical offices. And, in fact, this excuse was rational, for they instinctively hated gross stupidity. Between the Conquest and the death of King John, they established five hundred and fifty-seven schools in England. Henry Beauclerk, son of the Conqueror, was trained in the sciences; so were Henry II. and his three sons: Richard, the eldest of these, was a poet. Lanfranc, first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, a subtle logician, ably argued the Real Presence; Anselm, his successor, the first thinker of the age, thought he had discovered a new proof of the existence of God, and tried to make religion philosophical by adopting as his maxim, "Crede ut intelligas." The notion was doubtless grand, especially in the eleventh century; and they could not have gone more promptly to work. Of course the science I speak of was but scholastic, and these terrible folios slay more understandings than they confirm. But people must begin as they can; and syllogism, even in Latin, even in theology, is yet an exercise of the mind and a proof of the understanding. Among the continental priests who settled in

[1] Ordericus Vitalis.

England, one established a library; another, founder of a school, made the scholars perform the play of Saint Catherine; a third wrote in polished Latin, "epigrams as pointed as those of Martial." Such were the recreations of an intelligent race, eager for ideas, of ready and flexible genius, whose clear thought was not clouded, like that of the Saxon brain, by drunken hallucinations, and the vapours of a greedy and well-filled stomach. They loved conversations, tales of adventure. Side by side with their Latin chroniclers, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, thoughtful men already, who could not only relate, but criticise here and there, there were rhyming chronicles in the vulgar tongue, as those of Geoffroy Gaimar, Bénoît de Sainte-Maure, Robert Wace. Do not imagine that their verse-writers were sterile of words or lacking in details. They were talkers, tale-tellers, speakers above all, ready of tongue, and never stinted in speech. Not singers by any means; they speak—this is their strong point, in their poems as in their chronicles. They were the earliest who wrote the *Song of Roland;* upon this they accumulated a multitude of songs concerning Charlemagne and his peers, concerning Arthur and Merlin, the Greeks and Romans, King Horn, Guy of Warwick, every prince and every people. Their minstrels (*trouvères*), like their knights, draw in abundance from Welsh, Franks, and Latins, and descend upon East and West, in the wide field of adventure. They address themselves to a spirit of inquiry, as the Saxons to enthusiasm, and dilute in their long, clear, and flowing narratives the lively colours of German and Breton traditions; battles, surprises, single combats, embassies, speeches, processions, ceremonies, huntings,

a variety of amusing events, employ their ready and wandering imaginations. At first, in the *Song of Roland*, it is still kept in check; it walks with long strides, but only walks. Presently its wings have grown; incidents are multiplied; giants and monsters abound, the natural disappears, the song of the *jongleur* grows a poem under the hands of the *trouvère;* he would speak, like Nestor of old, five, even six years running, and not grow tired or stop. Forty thousand verses are not too much to satisfy their gabble; a facile mind, copious, inquisitive, descriptive, such is the genius of the race. The Gauls, their fathers, used to delay travellers on the road to make them tell their stories, and boasted, like these, "of fighting well and talking with ease."

With chivalric poetry, they are not wanting in chivalry; principally, it may be, because they are strong, and a strong man loves to prove his strength by knocking down his neighbours; but also from a desire of fame, and as a point of honour. By this one word honour the whole spirit of warfare is changed. Saxon poets painted war as a murderous fury, as a blind madness which shook flesh and blood, and awakened the instincts of the beast of prey; Norman poets describe it as a tourney. The new passion which they introduce is that of vanity and gallantry; Guy of Warwick dismounts all the knights in Europe, in order to deserve the hand of the prude and scornful Félice. The tourney itself is but a ceremony, somewhat brutal I admit, since it turns upon the breaking of arms and limbs, but yet brilliant and French. To show skill and courage, display the magnificence of dress and armour, be applauded by and please the ladies,—such

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feelings indicate men of greater sociality, more under the influence of public opinion, less the slaves of their own passions, void both of lyric inspiration and savage enthusiasm, gifted by a different genius, because inclined to other pleasures.

Such were the men who at this moment were disembarking in England to introduce their new manners and a new spirit, French at bottom, in mind and speech, though with special and provincial features; of all the most matter-of-fact, with an eye to the main chance, calculating, having the nerve and the dash of our own soldiers, but with the tricks and precautions of lawyers; heroic undertakers of profitable enterprises; having gone to Sicily and Naples, and ready to travel to Constantinople or Antioch, so it be to take a country or bring back money; subtle politicians, accustomed in Sicily to hire themselves to the highest bidder, and capable of doing a stroke of business in the heat of the Crusade, like Bohémond, who, before Antioch, speculated on the dearth of his Christian allies, and would only open the town to them under condition of their keeping it for himself; methodical and persevering conquerors, expert in administration, and fond of scribbling on paper, like this very William, who was able to organise such an expedition, and such an army, and kept a written roll of the same, and who proceeded to register the whole of England in his Domesday Book. Sixteen days after the disembarkation, the contrast between the two nations was manifested at Hastings by its visible effects.

The Saxons "ate and drank the whole night. You might have seen them struggling much, and leaping and

singing," with shouts of laughter and noisy joy.[1] In the morning they packed behind their palisades the dense masses of their heavy infantry, and with battle-axe hung round their neck awaited the attack. The wary Normans weighed the chances of heaven and hell, and tried to enlist God upon their side. Robert Wace, their historian and compatriot, is no more troubled by poetical imagination than they were by warlike inspiration; and on the eve of the battle his mind is as prosaic and clear as theirs.[2] The same spirit showed itself in the battle. They were for the most part bowmen and horsemen, well-skilled, nimble, and clever. Taillefer, the *jongleur*, who asked for the honour of striking the first blow, went singing, like a true French volunteer, performing tricks all the while.[3] Having arrived before the English, he

[1] Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou.*

[2] *Ibid.*

Et li Normanz et li Franceiz
Tote nuit firent oreisons,
Et furent en aflicions.
De lor péchiés confèz se firent
As proveires les regehirent,
Et qui n'en out proveires prèz,
A son veizin se fist confèz,
Pour ço ke samedi esteit
Ke la bataille estre debveit.

Unt Normanz a pramis e voé,
Si com li cler l'orent loé,
Ke à ce jor mez s'il veskeiént,
Char ni saunc ne mangereient
Giffrei, éveske de Coustances,
A plusors joint lor pénitances.
Cli reçut li confessions
Et dona li béneiçons.

[3] Robert Wace, *Roman du Rou:*

Taillefer ki moult bien cantout
Sur un roussin qui tot alout
Devant li dus alout cantant
De Kalermaine e de Rolant,
E d'Oliver et des vassals
Ki moururent à Roncevals.
Quant ils orent chevalchié tant
K'as Engleis vindrent aprismant.
"Sires! dist Taillefer, merci!
Je vos ai languement servi.

Tut mon servise me debvez,
Hui, si vos plaist, me le rendez
Por tout guerredun vos requier,
Et si vos voil forment preier,
Otreiez-mei, ke jo n'i faille,
Li primier colp de la bataille."
Et li dus répont: "Je l'otrei."
Et Taillefer point à desrei;
Devant toz li altres se mist,
Un Englez féri, si l'ocist.

cast his lance three times in the air, then his sword, and caught them again by the handle; and Harold's clumsy foot-soldiers, who only knew how to cleave coats of mail by blows from their battle-axes, "were astonished, saying to one another that it was magic." As for William, amongst a score of prudent and cunning actions, he performed two well-calculated ones, which, in this sore embarrassment, brought him safe out of his difficulties. He ordered his archers to shoot into the air; the arrows wounded many of the Saxons in the face, and one of them pierced Harold in the eye, After this he simulated flight; the Saxons, intoxicated with joy and wrath, quitted their entrenchments, and exposed themselves to the lances of his horsemen. During the remainder of the contest they only make a stand by small companies, fight with fury, and end by being slaughtered. The strong, mettlesome, brutal race threw themselves on the enemy like a savage bull; the dexterous Norman hunters wounded them adroitly, knocked them down, and placed them under the yoke.

III.

What then is this French race, which by arms and letters makes such a splendid entrance upon the world, and is so manifestly destined to rule, that in the East, for example, their name of Franks will be given to all the nations of the West? Wherein consists this new spirit, this precocious pioneer, this key of all middle-age civilisation? There is in every mind of the kind

De sos le pis, parmie la pance,
Li fist passer ultre la lance,
A terre estendu l'abati.
Poiz trait l'espée, altre féri.
Poiz a crié: "Venez, venez!
Ke fetes-vos? Férez, férez!"
Donc l'unt Englez avironé,
Al secund colp k'il ou doné.

a fundamental activity which, when incessantly repeated, moulds its plan, and gives it its direction; in town or country, cultivated or not, in its infancy and its age, it spends its existence and employs its energy in conceiving an event or an object. This is its original and perpetual process; and whether it change its region, return, advance, prolong, or alter its course, its whole motion is but a series of consecutive steps; so that the least alteration in the size, quickness, or precision of its primitive stride transforms and regulates the whole course, as in a tree the structure of the first shoot determines the whole foliage, and governs the whole growth.[1] When the Frenchman conceives an event or an object, he conceives quickly and distinctly; there is no internal disturbance, no previous fermentation of confused and violent ideas, which, becoming concentrated and elaborated, end in a noisy outbreak. The movement of his intelligence is nimble and prompt like that of his limbs; at once and without effort he seizes upon his idea. But he seizes that alone; he leaves on one side all the long entangling offshoots whereby it is entwined and twisted amongst its neighbouring ideas; he does not embarrass himself with nor think of them; he detaches, plucks, touches but slightly, and that is all. He is deprived, or if you prefer it, he is exempt from those sudden half-visions which disturb a man, and open up to him instantaneously vast deeps and far perspectives. Images are excited by internal commotion; he, not being so moved, imagines not. He is only moved superficially; he is without large sympathy; he does not perceive an object as it is, complex and combined, but in parts, with

[1] The idea of types is applicable throughout all physical and moral nature.

a discursive and superficial knowledge. That is why no race in Europe is less poetical. Let us look at their epics; none are more prosaic. They are not wanting in number: *The Song of Roland, Garin le Lohcrain, Ogier le Danois,*[1] *Berthe aux grands Pieds.* There is a library of them. Though their manners are heroic and their spirit fresh, though they have originality, and deal with grand events, yet, spite of this, the narrative is as dull as that of the babbling Norman chroniclers. Doubtless when Homer relates he is as clear as they are, and he develops as they do: but his magnificent titles of rosy-fingered Morn, the wide-bosomed Air, the divine and nourishing Earth, the earth-shaking Ocean, come in every instant and expand their purple bloom over the speeches and battles, and the grand abounding similes which interrupt the narrative tell of a people more inclined to enjoy beauty than to proceed straight to fact. But here we have facts, always facts, nothing but facts; the Frenchman wants to know if the hero will kill the traitor, the lover wed the maiden; he must not be delayed by poetry or painting. He advances nimbly to the end of the story, not lingering for dreams of the heart or wealth of landscape. There is no splendour, no colour, in his narrative; his style is quite bare, and without figures; you may read ten thousand verses in these old poems without meeting one. Shall we open the most ancient, the most original, the most eloquent, at the most moving point, the *Song of Roland,* when Roland is dying? The narrator is moved, and yet his language remains the same, smooth, accentless, so penetrated by the prosaic spirit, and so void of the poetic! He gives an abstract of motives, a summary of events, a series

[1] *Danois* is a contraction of *le d'Ardennois,* from the Ardennes.—TR.

of causes for grief, a series of causes for consolation.[1] Nothing more. These men regard the circumstance or the action by itself, and adhere to this view. Their idea remains exact, clear, and simple, and does not raise up a similar image to be confused with the first, to colour or transform itself. It remains dry; they conceive

[1] Genin, *Chanson de Roland* :

Co sent Rollans que la mort le trespent,
Devers la teste sur le quer li descent ;
Desuz un pin i est alet curant,
Sur l'herbe verte si est culchet adenz ;
Desuz lui met l'espée et l'olifan ;
Turnat sa teste vers la païene gent,
Pour ço l'at fait que il voelt veirement
Que Carles diet e trestute sa gent,
Li gentilz quens, qu'il fut mort cunquérant.
Cleimet sa culpe, e menut e suvent,
Pur ses pecchez en puroffrid lo guant.
Li quens Rollans se jut desuz un pin,
Envers Espaigne en ad turnet sun vis,
De plusurs choses a remembrer le prist.
De tantes terres cume li bers cunquist,
De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'nurrit.
Ne poet muer n'en plurt et ne susprit.
Mais lui meisme ne volt mettre en ubli.
Cleimet sa culpe, si priet Dieu mercit :
" Veire paterne, ki unques ne mentis,
Seint Lazaron de mort resurrexis,
Et Daniel des lions guaresis,
Guaris de mei l'arome de tuz perilz,
Pur les pecchez que en ma vie fis."
Sun destre guant à Deu en puroffrit.
Seint Gabriel de sa main l'ad pris.
Desur sun bras teneit le chef enclin,
Juntes ses mains est alet à sa fin.
Deus i tramist sun angle cherubin,
Et seint Michel qu'on cleimet del péril
Ensemble ad els seint Gabriel i vint,
L'anme del cunte portent en pareis.

the divisions of the object one by one, without ever collecting them, as the Saxons would, in an abrupt impassioned, glowing semi-vision. Nothing is more opposed to their genius than the genuine songs and profound hymns, such as the English monks were singing beneath the low vaults of their churches. They would be disconcerted by the unevenness and obscurity of such language. They are not capable of such an access of enthusiasm and such excess of emotion. They never cry out, they speak, or rather they converse, and that at moments when the soul, overwhelmed by its trouble might be expected to cease thinking and feeling. Thus Amis, in a mystery-play, being leprous, calmly requires his friend Amille to slay his two sons, in order that their blood may heal him of his leprosy; and Amille replies still more calmly,[1] If ever they try to sing, even in heaven, "a roundelay high and clear," they will produce little rhymed arguments, as dull as the dullest talk.[2]

[1] Mon très-chier ami débonnaire,
Vous m'avez une chose ditte
Qui n'est pas à faire petite
Mais que l'on doit moult resongnier.
Et nonpourquant, sanz eslongnier,
Puisque garison autrement
Ne povez avoir vraiement,
Pour vostre amour les occiray,
Et le sang vous apporteray.
Vraiz Diex, moult est excellente,
Et de grant charité plaine,
Vostre bonté souveraine.
Car vostre grâce présente,
A toute personne humaine,
Vraix Diex, moult est excellente,
Puisqu'elle a cuer et entente,
Et que à ce desir l'amaine
Que de vous servir se paine.

Pursue this literature to its conclusion; regard it, like that of the Skalds, at the time of its decadence, when its vices, being exaggerated, display, like those of the Skalds, only still more strongly the kind of mind which produced it. The Skalds fall off into nonsense; it loses itself into babble and platitude. The Saxon could not master his craving for exaltation; the Frenchman could not restrain the volubility of his tongue. He is too diffuse and too clear; the Saxon is too obscure and brief. The one was excessively agitated and carried away; the other explains and develops without measure. From the twelfth century the Gestes spun out degenerate into rhapsodies and psalmodies of thirty or forty thousand verses. Theology enters into them; poetry becomes an interminable, intolerable litany, where the ideas, expounded, developed, and repeated *ad infinitum*, without one outburst of emotion or one touch of originality, flow like a clear and insipid stream, and send off their reader, by dint of their monotonous rhymes, into a comfortable slumber. What a deplorable abundance of distinct and facile ideas! We meet with it again in the seventeenth century, in the literary gossip which took place at the feet of men of distinction; it is the fault and the talent of the race. With this involuntary art of perceiving, and isolating instantaneously and clearly each part of every object, people can speak, even for speaking's sake, and for ever.

Such is the primitive process; how will it be continued? Here appears a new trait in the French genius, the most valuable of all. It is necessary to comprehension that the second idea shall be contiguous to the first; otherwise that genius is thrown out of its course and arrested; it cannot proceed by irregular bounds;

it must walk step by step, on a straight road; order is innate in it; without study, and in the first place, it disjoints and decomposes the object or event, however complicated and entangled it may be, and sets the parts one by one in succession to each other, according to their natural connection. True, it is still in a state of barbarism; yet its intelligence is a reasoning faculty, which spreads, though unwittingly. Nothing is more clear than the style of the old French narratives and of the earliest poems: we do not perceive that we are following a narrator, so easy is the gait, so even the road he opens to us, so smoothly and gradually every idea glides into the next; and this is why he narrates so well. The chroniclers Villehardouin, Joinville, Froissart, the fathers of prose, have an ease and clearness approached by none, and beyond all, a charm, a grace, which they had not to go out of their way to find. Grace is a national possession in France, and springs from the native delicacy which has a horror of incongruities; the instinct of Frenchmen avoids violent shocks in works of taste as well as in works of argument; they desire that their sentiments and ideas shall harmonise, and not clash. Throughout they have this measured spirit, exquisitely refined.[1] They take care, on a sad subject, not to push emotion to its limits; they avoid big words. Think how Joinville relates in six lines the death of the poor sick priest who wished to finish celebrating the mass, and "never more did sing, and died." Open a mystery-play, *Théophilus*, or that of *the Queen of Hungary*, for instance: when they are going to burn her and her child, she says two short lines about "this gentle dew which is so pure an innocent," nothing more. Take a fabliau,

[1] See H. Taine, *La Fontaine and his Fables*, p. 15.

even a dramatic one: when the penitent knight, who has undertaken to fill a barrel with his tears, dies in the hermit's company, he asks from him only one last gift: "Do but embrace me, and then I'll die in the arms of my friend." Could a more touching sentiment be expressed in more sober language? We must say of their poetry what is said of certain pictures: This is made out of nothing. Is there in the world anything more delicately graceful than the verses of Guillaume de Lorris? Allegory clothes his ideas so as to dim their too great brightness; ideal figures, half transparent, float about the lover, luminous, yet in a cloud, and lead him amidst all the gentle and delicate-hued ideas to the rose, whose "sweet odour embalms all the plain." This refinement goes so far, that in Thibaut of Champagne and in Charles of Orléans it turns to affectation and insipidity. In them all impressions grow more slender; the perfume is so weak, that one often fails to catch it; on their knees before their lady they whisper their waggeries and conceits; they love politely and wittily; they arrange ingeniously in a bouquet their "painted words," all the flowers of "fresh and beautiful language;" they know how to mark fleeting ideas in their flight, soft melancholy, vague reverie; they are as elegant as talkative, and as charming as the most amiable abbés of the eighteenth century. This lightness of touch is proper to the race, and appears as plainly under the armour and amid the massacres of the middle ages as amid the courtsies and the musk-scented, wadded coats of the last court. You will find it in their colouring as in their sentiments. They are not struck by the magnificence of nature, they see only her pretty side; they paint the beauty of a woman by

a single feature, which is only polite, saying, "She is more gracious than the rose in May." They do not experience the terrible emotion, ecstasy, sudden oppression of heart which is displayed in the poetry of neighbouring nations; they say discreetly, "She began to smile, which vastly became her." They add, when they are in a descriptive humour, "that she had a sweet and perfumed breath," and a body "white as new-fallen snow on a branch." They do not aspire higher; beauty pleases, but does not transport them. They enjoy agreeable emotions, but are not fitted for deep sensations. The full rejuvenescence of being, the warm air of spring which renews and penetrates all existence, suggests but a pleasing couplet; they remark in passing, "Now is winter gone, the hawthorn blossoms, the rose expands," and so pass on about their business. It is a light gladsomeness, soon gone, like that which an April landscape affords. For an instant the author glances at the mist of the streams rising about the willow trees, the pleasant vapour which imprisons the brightness of the morning; then, humming a burden of a song, he returns to his narrative. He seeks amusement, and herein lies his power.

In life, as in literature, it is pleasure he aims at, not sensual pleasure or emotion. He is lively, not voluptuous; dainty, not a glutton. He takes love for a pastime, not for an intoxication. It is a pretty fruit which he plucks, tastes, and leaves. And we must remark yet further, that the best of the fruit in his eyes is the fact of its being forbidden. He says to himself that he is duping a husband, that "he deceives a cruel woman, and thinks he ought to obtain a pope's indulgence for the deed."[1] He wishes

[1] La Fontaine, *Contes, Richard Minutolo.*

to be merry—it is the state he prefers, the end and aim of his life; and especially to laugh at other people. The short verse of his fabliaux gambols and leaps like a schoolboy released from school, over all things respected or respectable; criticising the church, women, the great, the monks. Scoffers, banterers, our fathers have abundance both of expression and matter; and the matter comes to them so naturally, that without culture, and surrounded by coarseness, they are as delicate in their raillery as the most refined. They touch upon ridicule lightly, they mock without emphasis, as it were innocently; their style is so harmonious, that at first sight we make a mistake, and do not see any harm in it. They seem artless; they look so very demure; only a word shows the imperceptible smile: it is the ass, for example, which they call the high priest, by reason of his padded cassock and his serious air, and who gravely begins "to play the organ." At the close of the history, the delicate sense of comicality has touched you, though you cannot say how. They do not call things by their names, especially in love matters; they let you guess it; they assume that you are as sharp and knowing as themselves.[1] A man might discriminate, embellish at times, perhaps refine upon them, but their first traits are incomparable. When the fox approaches the raven to steal the cheese, he begins as a hypocrite, piously and cautiously, and as one of the family. He calls the raven his "good father Don Rohart, who sings so well;" he praises his voice, "so sweet and fine." "You would be the best singer in the world if you

[1] Parler lui veut d'une besogne
Où crois que peu conquerrérois
Si la besogne vous nommois.

kept clear of nuts." Reynard is a rogue, an artist in the way of invention, not a mere glutton; he loves roguery for its own sake; he rejoices in his superiority, and draws out his mockery. When Tibert, the cat, by his counsel hung himself at the bell rope, wishing to ring it, he uses irony, enjoys and relishes it, pretends to wax impatient with the poor fool whom he has caught, calls him proud, complains because the other does not answer, and because he wishes to rise to the clouds and visit the saints. And from beginning to end this long epic of Reynard the Fox is the same; the raillery never ceases, and never fails to be agreeable. Reynard has so much wit, that he is pardoned for everything. The necessity for laughter is national—so indigenous to the French, that a stranger cannot understand, and is shocked by it. This pleasure does not resemble physical joy in any respect, which is to be despised for its grossness; on the contrary, it sharpens the intelligence, and brings to light many a delicate or ticklish idea. The fabliaux are full of truths about men, and still more about women, about people of low rank, and still more about those of high rank; it is a method of philosophising by stealth and boldly, in spite of conventionalism, and in opposition to the powers that be. This taste has nothing in common either with open satire, which is offensive because it is cruel; on the contrary, it provokes good humour. We soon see that the jester is not ill-disposed, that he does not wish to wound: if he stings, it is as a bee, without venom; an instant later he is not thinking of it; if need be, he will take himself as an object of his pleasantry; all he wishes is to keep up in himself and in us sparkling and pleasing ideas. Do we not see here in advance an abstract of

the whole French literature, the incapacity for great poetry, the sudden and durable perfection of prose, the excellence of all the moods of conversation and eloquence, the reign and tyranny of taste and method, the art and theory of development and arrangement, the gift of being measured, clear, amusing, and piquant? We have taught Europe how ideas fall into order, and which ideas are agreeable; and this is what our Frenchmen of the eleventh century are about to teach their Saxons during five or six centuries, first with the lance, next with the stick, next with the birch.

IV.

Consider, then, this Frenchman or Norman, this man from Anjou or Maine, who in his well-knit coat of mail, with sword and lance, came to seek his fortune in England. He took the manor of some slain Saxon, and settled himself in it with his soldiers and comrades, gave them land, houses, the right of levying taxes, on condition of their fighting under him and for him, as men-at-arms, marshals, standard-bearers; it was a league in case of danger. In fact, they were in a hostile and conquered country, and they have to maintain themselves. Each one hastened to build for himself a place of refuge, castle or fortress,[1] well fortified, of solid stone, with narrow windows, strengthened with battlements, garrisoned by soldiers, pierced with loopholes. Then these men went to Salisbury, to the number of sixty thousand, all holders of land, having at least enough to maintain a man with horse or arms. There, placing their hands in William's, they promised him fealty and assistance; and the king's edict declared that they must be all united and bound

[1] At King Stephen's death there were 1115 castles.

together like brothers in arms, to defend and succour each other. They are an armed colony, stationary, like the Spartans amongst the Helots; and they make laws accordingly. When a Frenchman is found dead in any district, the inhabitants are to give up the murderer, or failing to do so, they must pay forty-seven marks as a fine; if the dead man is English, it rests with the people of the place to prove it by the oath of four near relatives of the deceased. They are to beware of killing a stag, boar, or fawn; for an offence against the forest-laws they will lose their eyes. They have nothing of all their property assured to them except as alms, or on condition of paying tribute, or by taking the oath of allegiance. Here a free Saxon proprietor is made a body-slave on his own estate.[1] Here a noble and rich Saxon lady feels on her shoulder the weight of the hand of a Norman valet, who is become by force her husband or her lover. There were Saxons of one sol, or of two sols, according to the sum which they gained for their masters; they sold them, hired them, worked them on joint account, like an ox or an ass. One Norman abbot has his Saxon predecessors dug up, and their bones thrown without the gates. Another keeps men-at-arms, who bring his recalcitrant monks to reason by blows of their swords. Imagine, if you can, the pride of these new lords, conquerors, strangers, masters, nourished by habits of violent activity, and by the savagery, ignorance, and passions of feudal life. "They thought they might do whatsoever they pleased," say the old chroniclers. "They shed blood indiscriminately, snatched the morsel of bread from the mouth of the wretched, and seized upon all the money, the goods, the land."[2] Thus "all the folk in the low country were

[1] A. Thierry, *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre*, ii.
[2] William of Malmesbury. A. Thierry, ii. 20, 122–203.

at great pains to seem humble before Ivo Taille-bois, and only to address him with one knee on the ground; but although they made a point of paying him every honour, and giving him all and more than all which they owed him in the way of rent and service, he harassed, tormented, tortured, imprisoned them, set his dogs upon their cattle, . . . broke the legs and backbones of their beasts of burden, . . . and sent men to attack their servants on the road with sticks and swords."[1] The Normans would not and could not borrow any idea or custom from such boors;[2] they despised them as coarse and stupid. They stood amongst them, as the Spaniards amongst the Americans in the sixteenth century, superior in force and culture, more versed in letters, more expert in the arts of luxury. They preserved their manners and their speech. England, to all outward appearance —the court of the king, the castles of the nobles, the palaces of the bishops, the houses of the wealthy—was French; and the Scandinavian people, of whom sixty years ago the Saxon kings used to have poems sung to them, thought that the nation had forgotten its language, and treated it in their laws as though it were no longer their sister.

It was a French literature, then, which was at this time domiciled across the channel,[3] and the conquerors tried to make it purely French, purged from all Saxon alloy. They made such a point of this, that the nobles in the reign of Henry II. sent their sons to France, to

[1] A. Thierry.

[2] "In the year 652," says Warton, i. 3, "it was the common practice of the Anglo-Saxons to send their youth to the monasteries of France for education; and not only the language but the manners of the French were esteemed the most polite accomplishments."

[3] Warton, i. 5.

preserve them from barbarisms. "For two hundred years," says Higden,[1] "children in scole, agenst the usage and manir of all other nations beeth compelled for to leve hire own langage, and for to construe hir lessons and hire thynges in Frensche." The statutes of the universities obliged the students to converse either in French or Latin. "Gentilmen children beeth taught to speke Frensche from the tyme that they bith rokked in hire cradell; and uplondissche men will likne himself to gentylmen, and fondeth with greet besynesse for to speke Frensche." Of course the poetry is French. The Norman brought his minstrel with him; there was Taillefer, the *jongleur*, who sang the *Song of Roland* at the battle of Hastings; there was Adeline, the *jongleuse*, who received an estate in the partition which followed the Conquest. The Norman who ridiculed the Saxon kings, who dug up the Saxon saints, and cast them without the walls of the church, loved none but French ideas and verses. It was into French verse that Robert Wace rendered the legendary history of the England which was conquered, and the actual history of the Normandy in which he continued to live. Enter one of the abbeys where the minstrels come to sing, "where the clerks after dinner and supper read poems, the chronicles of kingdoms, the wonders of the world,"[2] you will only find Latin or French verses, Latin or French prose. What becomes

[1] Trevisa's translation of the *Polycronycon*.

[2] Statutes of foundation of New College, Oxford. In the abbey of Glastonbury, in 1247: *Liber de excidio Trojæ, gesta Ricardi regis, gesta Alexandri Magni, etc.* In the abbey of Peterborough: *Amys et Amelion, Sir Tristam, Guy de Bourgogne, gesta Otuclis, les prophéties de Merlin, le Charlemagne de Turpin, la destruction de Troie, etc.* Warton, *ibidem*.

of English? Obscure, despised, we hear it no more, except in the mouths of degraded franklins, outlaws of the forest, swineherds, peasants, the lowest orders. It is no longer, or scarcely written; gradually we find in the Saxon chronicle that the idiom alters, is extinguished; the chronicle itself ceases within a century after the Conquest.[1] The people who have leisure or security enough to read or write are French; for them authors devise and compose; literature always adapts itself to the taste of those who can appreciate and pay for it. Even the English[2] endeavour to write in French: thus Robert Grostête, in his allegorical poem on Christ; Peter Langtoft, in his *Chronicle of England,* and in his *Life of Thomas à Becket;* Hugh de Rotheland, in his poem of *Hippomedon;* John Hoveden, and many others. Several write the first half of the verse in English, and the second in French; a strange sign of the ascendency which is moulding and oppressing them. Even in the fifteenth century,[3] many of these poor folk are employed in this task; French is the language of the court, from it arose all poetry and elegance; he is but a clodhopper who is inapt at that style. They apply themselves to it as our old scholars did to Latin verses; they are gallicised as those were latinised, by constraint, with a sort of fear, knowing well that they are but schoolboys and provincials. Gower, one of their best poets, at the end of his French works, excuses himself humbly for not having "de Français la faconde. Pardonnez moi," he says, "que de ce je forsvoie; je suis Anglais."

[1] In 1154. [2] Warton, i. 72–78.

[3] In 1400. Warton, ii. 248. Gower died in 1408; his French ballads belong to the end of the fourteenth century.

And yet, after all, neither the race nor the tongue has perished. It is necessary that the Norman should learn English, in order to command his tenants; his Saxon wife speaks it to him, and his sons receive it from the lips of their nurse; the contagion is strong, for he is obliged to send them to France, to preserve them from the jargon which on his domain threatens to overwhelm and spoil them. From generation to generation the contagion spreads; they breathe it in the air, with the foresters in the chase, the farmers in the field, the sailors on the ships: for these coarse people, shut in by their animal existence, are not the kind to learn a foreign language; by the simple weight of their dulness they impose their idiom on their conquerors, at all events such words as pertain to living things. Scholarly speech, the language of law, abstract and philosophical expressions,—in short, all words depending on reflection and culture may be French, since there is nothing to prevent it. This is just what happens; these kind of ideas and this kind of speech are not understood by the commonalty, who, not being able to touch them, cannot change them. This produces a French, a colonial French, doubtless perverted, pronounced with closed mouth, with a contortion of the organs of speech, "after the school of Stratford-atte-Bow;" yet it is still French. On the other hand, as regards the speech employed about common actions and visible objects, it is the people, the Saxons, who fix it; these living words are too firmly rooted in his experience to allow of being parted with, and thus the whole substance of the language comes from him. Here, then, we have the Norman who, slowly and constrainedly, speaks and understands English, a deformed, gallicised English, yet English, in sap and root;

but he has taken his time about it, for it has required two centuries. It was only under Henry III. that the new tongue is complete, with the new constitution; and that, after the like fashion, by alliance and intermixture; the burgesses come to take their seats in Parliament with the nobles, at the same time that Saxon words settle down in the language side by side with French words.

V.

So was modern English formed, by compromise, and the necessity of being understood. But we can well imagine that these nobles, even while speaking the rising dialect, have their hearts full of French tastes and ideas; France remains the home of their mind, and the literature which now begins, is but translation. Translators, copyists, imitators—there is nothing else. England is a distant province, which is to France what the United States were, thirty years ago, to Europe: she exports her wool, and imports her ideas. Open the *Voyage and Travaile of Sir John Maundeville,*[1] the oldest prose-writer, the Villehardouin of the country: his book is but the translation of a translation.[2] He writes first in Latin, the language of scholars; then in French, the

[1] He wrote in 1356, and died in 1372.

[2] "And for als moche as it is longe time passed that ther was no generalle Passage ne Vyage over the See, and many Men desiren for to here speke of the holy Lond, and han thereof gret Solace and Comfort, I, John Maundevylle, Knyght, alle be it I be not worthi, that was born in Englond, in the town of Seynt-Albones, passed the See in the Zeer of our Lord Jesu-Crist 1322, in the Day of Seynt Michelle, and hidreto have been longe tyme over the See, and have seyn and gon thorghe manye dyverse londes, and many Provynces, and Kingdomes, and Iles.

"And zee shulle undirstonde that I have put this Boke out of Latyn into Frensche, and translated it azen out of Frensche, into Englyssche, that every Man of my Nacioun may undirstonde it."—*Sir John Maundeville's Voyage and Travaile*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, prologue, p. 4.

language of society; finally he reflects, and discovers that the barons, his compatriots, by governing the Saxon churls, have ceased to speak their own Norman, and that the rest of the nation never knew it; he translates his manuscript into English, and, in addition, takes care to make it plain, feeling that he speaks to less expanded understandings. He says in French:—"Il advint une fois que Mahomet allait dans une chapelle où il y avait un saint ermite. Il entra en la chapelle où il y avait une petite huissérie et basse, et était bien petite la chapelle; et alors devint la porte si grande qu'il semblait que ce fut la porte d'un palais."

He stops, corrects himself, wishes to explain himself better for his readers across the Channel, and says in English:—"And at the Desertes of Arabye, he wente into a Chapelle where a Eremyte duelte. And whan he entred in to the Chapelle that was but a lytille and a low thing, and had but a lytill Dore and a low, than the Entree began to wexe so gret and so large, and so highe, as though it had ben of a gret Mynstre, or the Zate of a Paleys."[1] You perceive that he amplifies, and thinks himself bound to clinch and drive in three or four times in succession the same idea, in order to get it into an English brain; his thought is drawn out, dulled, spoiled in the process. Like every copy, the new literature is mediocre, and repeats what it imitates, with fewer merits and greater faults.

Let us see, then, what our Norman baron gets translated for him; first, the chronicles of Geoffroy Gaimar

[1] *Sir John Maundeville's Voyage and Travaile*, ed. Halliwell, 1866, xii. p. 139. It is confessed that the original on which Wace depended for his ancient *History of England* is the Latin compilation of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

and Robert Wace, which consist of the fabulous history of England continued up to their day, a dull-rhymed rhapsody, turned into English in a rhapsody no less dull. The first Englishman who attempts it is Layamon,[1] a monk of Ernely, still fettered in the old idiom, who sometimes happens to rhyme, sometimes fails, altogether barbarous and childish, unable to develop a continuous idea, babbling in little confused and incomplete phrases, after the fashion of the ancient Saxons; after him a monk, Robert of Gloucester,[2] and a canon, Robert of

[1] Extract from the account of the proceedings at Arthur's coronation given by Layamon, in his translation of Wace, executed about 1180. Madden's *Layamon*, 1847, ii. p. 625, *et passim*:

Tha the king igeten hafde
And al his mon-weorede,
Tha bugen ut of burhge
Theines swithe balde.
Alle tha kinges,
And heore here-thringes.
Alle tha biscopes,
And alle tha clærckes,
All the eorles,
And alle tha beornes.
Alle tha theines,
Alle the sweines,
Feire iscrudde,
Helde geond felde.
Summe heo gunnen æruen,
Summe heo gunnen urnen,
Summe heo gunnen lepen,
Summe heo gunnen sceoten,
Summe heo wræstleden
And wither-gome makeden,
Summe heo on uelde
Pleouweden under scelde,
Summe heo driven balles
Wide geond tha feldes.
Monianes kunnes gomen
Ther heo gunnen driuen.
And wha swa mihte iwinne
Wurthscipe of his gomene,
Hine me ladde mid songe
At foren than leod kinge;
And the king, for his gomene,
Gaf him geven gode.
Alle tha quene
The icumen weoren there,
And alle tha lafdies,
Leoneden geond walles,
To bihalden the dugethen,
And that folc plæie.
This ilæste threo dæges,
Swulc gomes and swulc plæges,
Tha, at than veorthe dæie
The king gon to spekene
And agæf his goden cnihten
All heore rihten;
He gef seolver, he gæf gold,
He gef hors, he gef lond,
Castles, and clœthes eke;
His monnen he iquendæ.

[2] After 1297.

Brunne, both as insipid and clear as their French models, having become gallicised, and adopted the significant characteristic of the race, namely, the faculty and habit of easy narration, of seeing moving spectacles without deep emotion, of writing prosaic poetry, of discoursing and developing, of believing that phrases ending in the same sounds form real poetry. Our honest English versifiers, like their preceptors in Normandy and Ile-de-France, garnished with rhymes their dissertations and histories, and called them poems. At this epoch, in fact, on the Continent, the whole learning of the schools descends into the street; and Jean de Meung, in his poem of *la Rose*, is the most tedious of doctors. So in England, Robert of Brunne transposes into verse the *Manuel des Péchés* of Bishop Grostête; Adam Davie,[1] certain Scripture histories; Hampole[2] composes the *Pricke of Conscience*. The titles alone make one yawn: what of the text?

> "Mankynde mad ys to do Goddus wylle,
> And alle Hys byddyngus to fulfille;
> For of al Hys makyng more and les,
> Man most principal creature es.
> Al that He made for man hit was done,
> As ye schal here after sone."[3]

There is a poem! You did not think so; call it a sermon, if you will give it its proper name. It goes on, well divided, well prolonged, flowing, but void of meaning; the literature which surrounds and resembles it bears witness of its origin by its loquacity and its clearness.

It bears witness to it by other and more agreeable

[1] About 1312. [2] About 1349. [3] Warton, ii. 36.

features. Here and there we find divergences more or less awkward into the domain of genius; for instance, a ballad full of quips against Richard, King of the Romans, who was taken at the battle of Lewes. Sometimes, charm is not lacking, nor sweetness either. No one has ever spoken so bright and so well to the ladies as the French of the Continent, and they have not quite forgotten this talent while settling in England. You perceive it readily in the manner in which they celebrate the Virgin. Nothing could be more different from the Saxon sentiment, which is altogether biblical, than the chivalric adoration of the sovereign Lady, the fascinating Virgin and Saint, who was the real deity of the middle ages. It breathes in this pleasing hymn:

"Blessed beo thu, lavedi,
Ful of hovene blisse;
Swete flur of parais,
Moder of milternisse. . . .
I-blessed beo thu, Lavedi,
So fair and so briht;
Al min hope is uppon the,
Bi day and bi nicht. . . .
Bricht and scene quen of storre,
So me liht and lere.
In this false fikele world,
So me led and steore."[1]

There is but a short and easy step between this tender worship of the Virgin and the sentiments of the court of love. The English rhymesters take it; and when they wish to praise their earthly mistresses, they borrow, here as elsewhere, the ideas and the very form of French

[1] Time of Henry III., *Reliquiæ Antiquiæ*, edited by Messrs. Wright and Halliwell, i. 102.

verse. One compares his lady to all kinds of precious stones and flowers; others sing truly amorous songs, at times sensual:

"Bytuene Mershe and Aueril,
When spray biginneth to springe,
The lutel foul hath hire wyl
On hyre lud to synge,
Ich libbe in louelonginge
For semlokest of alle thynge.
He may me blysse bringe,
Icham in hire baundoun.
An hendy hap ichabbe yhent,
Ichot from heuene it is me sent.
From alle wymmen my love is lent,
And lyht on Alisoun."[1]

Another sings:

"Suete lemmon, y preye the, of loue one speche,
Whil y lyue in world so wyde other nulle y seche.
With thy loue, my suete leof, mi bliss thou mihtes eche
A suete cos of thy mouth mihte be my leche."[2]

Is not this the lively and warm imagination of the south? they speak of springtime and of love, "the fine and lovely weather," like *trouvères*, even like *troubadours*. The dirty, smoke-grimed cottage, the black feudal castle, where all but the master lie higgledy-piggledy on the straw in the great stone hall, the cold rain, the muddy earth, make the return of the sun and the warm air delicious.

"Sumer is i-cumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu:
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
And springeth the wde nu.

[1] About 1278. Warton, i. 28. [2] *Ibid.* i. 31.

Sing cuccu, cuccu.
Awe bleteth after lomb,
Llouth after calue cu,
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth:
Murie sing cuccu,
Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu cuccu;
Ne swik thu nauer nu.
Sing, cuccu nu,
Sing, cuccu.[1]

Here are glowing pictures, such as Guillaume de Lorris was writing, at the same time, even richer and more life-like, perhaps because the poet found here for inspiration that love of country life which in England is deep and national. Others, more imitative, attempt pleasantries like those of Rutebeuf and the fabliaux, frank quips,[2] and even satirical loose waggeries. Their true aim and end is to hit out at the monks. In every French country or country which imitates France, the most manifest use of convents is to furnish material for sprightly and scandalous stories. One writes, for instance, of the kind of life the monks lead at the abbey of Cocagne:

"There is a wel fair abbei,
Of white monkes and of grei.
Ther beth bowris and halles:
Al of pasteiis beth the wallis,
Of fleis, of fisse, and rich met,
The likfullist that man may et.
Fluren cakes beth the schingles alle,
Of cherche, cloister, boure, and halle.

[1] Warton, i. 30.

[2] *Poem of the Owl and Nightingale*, who dispute as to which has the finest voice.

The pinnes beth fat podinges
Rich met to princes and kinges. . . .
Though paradis be miri and bright
Cokaign is of fairir sight. . . .
Another abbei is therbi,
Forsoth a gret fair nunnerie. . . .
When the someris dai is hote
The young nunnes takith a bote . . .
And doth ham forth in that river
Both with ores and with stere. . . .
And euch monk him takith on,
And snellich berrith forth har prei
To the mochil grei abbei,
And techith the nunnes an oreisun,
With iambleue up and down."

This is the triumph of gluttony and feeding. Moreover many things could be mentioned in the middle ages, which are now unmentionable. But it was the poems of chivalry which represented to him the bright side of his own mode of life, that the baron preferred to have translated. He desired that his *trouvère* should set before his eyes the magnificence which he displayed, and the luxury and enjoyments which he has introduced from France. Life at that time, without and even during war, was a great pageant, a brilliant and tumultuous kind of fête. When Henry II. travelled, he took with him a great number of horsemen, foot-soldiers, baggage-waggons, tents, pack-horses, comedians, courtesans, and their overseers, cooks, confectioners, posture-makers, dancers, barbers, go-betweens, hangers-on.[1] In the morning when they start, the assemblage begins to shout, sing, hustle each other, make racket and rout,

[1] Letter of Peter of Blois.

"as if hell were let loose." William Longchamps, even in time of peace, would not travel without a thousand horses by way of escort. When Archbishop à Becket came to France, he entered the town with two hundred knights, a number of barons and nobles, and an army of servants, all richly armed and equipped, he himself being provided with four-and-twenty suits; two hundred and fifty children walked in front, singing national songs; then dogs, then carriages, then a dozen pack-horses, each ridden by an ape and a man; then equerries with shields and war-horses; then more equerries, falconers, a suite of domestics, knights, priests; lastly, the archbishop himself, with his private friends. Imagine these processions, and also these entertainments; for the Normans, after the Conquest, "borrowed from the Saxons the habit of excess in eating and drinking."[1] At the marriage of Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cornwall, they provided thirty thousand dishes.[2] They also continued to be gallant, and punctiliously performed the great precept of the love courts; for in the middle age the sense of love was no more idle than the others. Moreover, tournaments were plentiful; a sort of opera prepared for their own entertainment. So ran their life, full of adventure and adornment, in the open air and in the sunlight, with show of cavalcades and arms; they act a pageant, and act it with enjoyment. Thus the King of Scots, having come to London with a

[1] William of Malmesbury.

[2] At the installation-feast of George Nevill, Archbishop of York, the brother of Guy of Warwick, there were consumed, 104 oxen and 6 wild bulls, 1000 sheep, 304 calves, as many hogs, 2000 swine, 500 stags, bucks, and does, 204 kids, 22,802 wild or tame fowl, 300 quarters of corn, 300 tuns of ale, 100 of wine, a pipe of hypocras, 12 porpoises and seals.

hundred knights, at the coronation of Edward I., they all dismounted, and made over their horses and superb caparisons to the people; as did also five English lords, imitating their example. In the midst of war they took their pleasure. Edward III., in one of his expeditions against the King of France, took with him thirty falconers, and made his campaign alternately hunting and fighting.[1] Another time, says Froissart, the knights who joined the army carried a plaster over one eye, having vowed not to remove it until they had performed an exploit worthy of their mistresses. Out of the very exuberancy of spirit they practised the art of poetry; out of the buoyancy of their imagination they made a sport of life. Edward III. built at Windsor a hall and a round table; and at one of his tourneys in London, sixty ladies, seated on palfreys, led, as in a fairy tale, each her knight by a golden chain. Was not this the triumph of the gallant and frivolous French fashions? Edward's wife Philippa sat as a model to the artists for their Madonnas. She appeared on the field of battle; listened to Froissart, who provided her with moral-plays, love-stories, and "things fair to listen to." At once goddess, heroine, and scholar, and all this so agreeably, was she not a true queen of refined chivalry? Now, as also in France under Louis of Orleans and the Dukes of Burgundy, this most elegant and romanesque civilisation came into full bloom, void of common sense, given up to passion, bent on pleasure, immoral and brilliant, but, like its neighbours of Italy and Provence, for lack of serious intention, it could not last.

Of all these marvels the narrators make display in

[1] These prodigalities and refinements grew to excess under his grandson Richard II.

their stories. Here is a picture of the vessel which took the mother of King Richard into England;—

"Swlk on ne seygh they never non;
All it was whyt of huel-bon,
And every nayl with gold begrave:
Off pure gold was the stave.
Her mast was of yvory;
Off samyte the sayl wytterly.
Her ropes wer off tuely sylk,
Al so whyt as ony mylk.
That noble schyp was al withoute,
With clothys of golde sprede aboute;
And her loof and her wyndas,
Off asure forsothe it was."[1]

On such subjects they never run dry. When the King of Hungary wishes to console his afflicted daughter, he proposes to take her to the chase in the following style:—

"To-morrow ye shall in hunting fare:
And ride, my daughter, in a chair;
It shall be covered with velvet red,
And cloths of fine gold all about your head,
With damask white and azure blue,
Well diapered with lilies new.
Your pommels shall be ended with gold,
Your chains enamelled many a fold,
Your mantle of rich degree,
Purple pall and ermine free.
Jennets of Spain that ben so light,
Trapped to the ground with velvet bright.
Ye shall have harp, sautry, and song,
And other mirths you among.

[1] Warton, i. 156.

Ye shall have Rumney and Malespine,
Both hippocras and Vernage wine;
Montrese and wine of Greek,
Both Algrade and despice eke,
Antioch and Bastarde,
Pyment also and garnarde;
Wine of Greek and Muscadel,
Both clare, pyment, and Rochelle,
The reed your stomach to defy,
And pots of osey set you by.
You shall have venison ybake,
The best wild fowl that may be take;
A leish of harehound with you to streek,
And hart, and hind, and other like.
Ye shall be set at such a tryst,
That hart and hynd shall come to you fist,
Your disease to drive you fro,
To hear the bugles there yblow.
Homeward thus shall ye ride,
On hawking by the river's side,
With gosshawk and with gentle falcon,
With bugle-horn and merlion.
When you come home your menie among,
Ye shall have revel, dance, and song;
Little children, great and small,
Shall sing as does the nightingale.
Then shall ye go to your evensong,
With tenors and trebles among.
Threescore of copes of damask bright,
Full of pearls they shall be pight.
Your censors shall be of gold,
Indent with azure many a fold;
Your quire nor organ song shall want,
With contre-note and descant.
The other half on organs playing,
With young children full fain singing.

Then shall ye go to your supper,
And sit in tents in green arber,
With cloth of arras pight to the ground,
With sapphires set of diamond.
A hundred knights, truly told,
Shall play with bowls in alleys cold,
Your disease to drive away;
To see the fishes in pools play,
To a drawbridge then shall ye,
Th' one half of stone, th' other of tree;
A barge shall meet you full right,
With twenty-four oars full bright,
With trumpets and with clarion,
The fresh water to row up and down. . . .
Forty torches burning bright
At your bridge to bring you light.
Into your chamber they shall you bring,
With much mirth and more liking.
Your blankets shall be of fustian,
Your sheets shall be of cloth of Rennes.
Your head sheet shall be of pery pight,
With diamonds set and rubies bright.
When you are laid in bed so soft,
A cage of gold shall hang aloft,
With long paper fair burning,
And cloves that be sweet smelling.
Frankincense and olibanum,
That when ye sleep the taste may come;
And if ye no rest can take,
All night minstrels for you shall wake."[1]

Amid such fancies and splendours the poets delight and lose themselves; and the woof, like the embroideries of their canvas, bears the mark of this love of deco-

[1] Warton, i. 176, spelling modernised.

ration. They weave it out of adventures, of extraordinary and surprising events. Now it is the life of King Horn, who, thrown into a boat when a lad, is wrecked upon the coast of England, and, becoming a knight, reconquers the kingdom of his father. Now it is the history of Sir Guy, who rescues enchanted knights, cuts down the giant Colbrand, challenges and kills the Sultan in his tent. It is not for me to recount these poems, which are not English, but only translations; still, here as in France, there are many of them; they fill the imagination of the young society, and they grow in exaggeration, until, falling to the lowest depth of insipidity and improbability, they are buried for ever by Cervantes. What would people say of a society which had no literature but the opera with its unrealities? Yet it was a literature of this kind which formed the intellectual food of the middle ages. People then did not ask for truth, but entertainment, and that vehement and hollow, full of glare and startling events. They asked for impossible voyages, extravagant challenges, a racket of contests, a confusion of magnificence and entanglement of chances. For introspective history they had no liking, cared nothing for the adventures of the heart, devoted their attention to the outside. They remained children to the last, with eyes glued to a series of exaggerated and coloured images, and, for lack of thinking, did not perceive that they had learnt nothing.

What was there beneath this fanciful dream? Brutal and evil human passions, unchained at first by religious fury, then delivered up to their own devices, and, beneath a show of external courtesy, as vile as ever. Look at the popular king, Richard Cœur de Lion, and reckon up his butcheries and murders: "King Richard,"

says a poem, "is the best king ever mentioned in song."[1] I have no objection; but if he has the heart of a lion, he has also that brute's appetite. One day, under the walls of Acre, being convalescent, he had a great desire for some pork. There was no pork. They killed a young Saracen, fresh and tender, cooked and salted him, and the king ate him and found him very good; whereupon he desired to see the head of the pig. The cook brought it in trembling. The king falls a laughing, and says the army has nothing to fear from famine, having provisions ready at hand. He takes the town, and presently Saladin's ambassadors come to sue for pardon for the prisoners. Richard has thirty of the most noble beheaded, and bids his cook boil the heads, and serve one to each ambassador, with a ticket bearing the name and family of the dead man. Meanwhile, in their presence, he eats his own with a relish, bids them tell Saladin how the Christians make war, and ask him if it is true that they fear him. Then he orders the sixty thousand prisoners to be led into the plain:

> "They were led into the place full even.
> There they heard angels of heaven;
> They said: "Seigneures, tuez, tuez!
> Spares hem nought, and beheadeth these!"
> King Richard heard the angels' voice,
> And thanked God and the holy cross."

Thereupon they behead them all. When he took a town, it was his wont to murder every one, even children and women. Such was the devotion of the middle ages, not only in romances, as here, but in history. At the

[1] Warton, i. 123:

> "In Fraunce these rhymes were wroht.
> Every Englyshe ne knew it not."

taking of Jerusalem the whole population, seventy thousand persons, were massacred.

Thus even in chivalrous stories the fierce and unbridled instincts of the bloodthirsty brute break out. The authentic narratives show it. Henry II. irritated at a page, attempted to tear out his eyes.[1] John Lackland let twenty-three hostages die in prison of hunger. Edward II. caused at one time twenty-eight nobles to be hanged and disembowelled, and was himself put to death by the insertion of a red-hot iron into his bowels. Look in Froissart for the debaucheries and murders in France as well as in England, of the Hundred Years' War, and then for the slaughters of the Wars of the Roses. In both countries feudal independence ended in civil war, and the middle age founders under its vices. Chivalrous courtesy, which cloaked the native ferocity, disappears like some hangings suddenly consumed by the breaking out of a fire; at that time in England they killed nobles in preference, and prisoners too, even children, with insults, in cold blood. What, then, did man learn in this civilisation and by this literature? How was he humanised? What precepts of justice, habits of reflection, store of true judgments, did this culture interpose between his desires and his actions, in order to moderate his passion? He dreamed, he imagined a sort of elegant ceremonial in order the better to address lords and ladies; he discovered the gallant code of little Jehan de Saintré. But where is the true education? Wherein has Froissart profited by all his vast experience? He was a fine specimen of a babbling child; what they called his poesy, the *poésie neuve*, is only a refined gabble, a senile puerility. Some rheto-

[1] See Lingard's *History*, ii. 55, note 4.—TR.

ricians, like Christine de Pisan, try to round their periods after an ancient model; but all their literature amounts to nothing. No one can think. Sir John Maundeville, who travelled all over the world a hundred and fifty years after Villehardouin, is as contracted in his ideas as Villehardouin himself. Extraordinary legends and fables, every sort of credulity and ignorance, abound in his book. When he wishes to explain why Palestine has passed into the hands of various possessors instead of continuing under one government, he says that it is because God would not that it should continue longer in the hands of traitors and sinners, whether Christians or others. He has seen at Jerusalem, on the steps of the temple, the footmarks of the ass which our lord rode on Palm Sunday. He describes the Ethiopians as a people who have only one foot, but so large that they can make use of it as a parasol. He instances one island "where be people as big as gyants, of 28 feet long, and have no cloathing but beasts' skins;" then another island, "where there are many evil and foul women, but have precious stones in their eyes, and have such force that if they behold any man with wrath, they slay him with beholding, as the basilisk doth." The good man relates; that is all: doubt and common sense scarcely exist in the world he lives in. He has neither judgment nor reflection; he piles facts one on top of another, with no further connection; his book is simply a mirror which reproduces recollections of his eyes and ears. "And all those who will say a Pater and an Ave Maria in my behalf, I give them an interest and a share in all the holy pilgrimages I ever made in my life." That is his farewell, and accords with all the rest. Neither public morality nor public knowledge

has gained anything from these three centuries of culture. This French culture, copied in vain throughout Europe, has but superficially adorned mankind, and the varnish with which it decked them, is already tarnished everywhere or scales off. It was worse in England, where the thing was more superficial and the application worse than in France, where foreign hands laid it on, and where it could only half cover the Saxon crust, where that crust was worn away and rough. That is the reason why, during three centuries, throughout the whole first feudal age, the literature of the Normans in England, made up of imitations, translations, and clumsy copies, ends in nothing.

VI.

Meantime, what has become of the conquered people? Has the old stock, on which the brilliant continental flowers were grafted, engendered no literary shoot of its own? Did it continue barren during all this time under the Norman axe, which stripped it of all its buds? It grew very feebly, but it grew nevertheless. The subjugated race is not a dismembered nation, dislocated, uprooted, sluggish, like the populations of the Continent, which, after the long Roman oppression, were given up to the unrestrained invasion of barbarians; it increased, remained fixed in its own soil, full of sap: its members were not displaced; it was simply lopped in order to receive on its crown a cluster of foreign branches. True, it had suffered, but at last the wound closed, the saps mingled. Even the hard, stiff ligatures with which the Conqueror bound it, henceforth contributed to its fixity and vigour. The land was mapped out; every title veri-

fied, defined in writing;[1] every right or tenure valued; every man registered as to his locality, and also his condition, duties, descent, and resources, so that the whole nation was enveloped in a network of which not a mesh would break. Its future development had to be within these limits. Its constitution was settled, and in this positive and stringent enclosure men were compelled to unfold themselves and to act. Solidarity and strife; these were the two effects of the great and orderly establishment which shaped and held together, on one side the aristocracy of the conquerors, on the other the conquered people; even as in Rome the systematic fusing of conquered peoples into the plebs, and the constrained organisation of the patricians in contrast with the plebs, enrolled the private individuals in two orders, whose opposition and union formed the state. Thus, here as in Rome, the national character was moulded and completed by the habit of corporate action, the respect for written law, political and practical aptitude, the development of combative and patient energy. It was the Domesday Book which, binding this young society in a rigid discipline, made of the Saxon the Englishman of our own day.

Gradually and slowly, amidst the gloomy complainings of the chroniclers, we find the new man fashioned by action, like a child who cries because steel stays, though they improve his figure, give him pain. However reduced and downtrodden the Saxons were, they did not

[1] Domesday Book. Froude's *Hist. of England*, 1858, i. 13: "Through all these arrangements a single aim is visible, that every man in England should have his definite place and definite duty assigned to him, and that no human being should be at liberty to lead at his own pleasure an unaccountable existence. The discipline of an army was transferred to the details of social life."

all sink into the populace. Some,[1] almost in every county, remained lords of their estates, on the condition of doing homage for them to the king. Many became vassals of Norman barons, and remained proprietors on this condition. A greater number became socagers, that is, free proprietors, burdened with a tax, but possessed of the right of alienating their property; and the Saxon villeins found patrons in these, as the plebs formerly did in the Italian nobles who were transplanted to Rome. The patronage of the Saxons who preserved their integral position was effective, for they were not isolated: marriages from the first united the two races, as it had the patricians and plebeians of Rome;[2] a Norman brother-in-law to a Saxon, defended himself in defending him. In those turbulent times, and in an armed community, relatives and allies were obliged to stand shoulder to shoulder in order to keep their ground. After all, it was necessary for the new-comers to consider their subjects, for these subjects had the heart and courage of men: the Saxons, like the plebeians at Rome, remembered their native rank and their original independence. We can recognise it in the complaints and indignation of the chroniclers, in the growling and menaces of popular revolt, in the long bitterness with which they continually recalled their ancient liberty, in

[1] Domesday Book, "tenants-in-chief."

[2] According to Ailred (temp. Hen. II.), "a king, many bishops and abbots, many great earls and noble knights descended both from English and Norman blood, constituted a support to the one and an honour to the other." "At present," says another author of the same period, "as the English and Normans dwell together, and have constantly intermarried, the two nations are so completely mingled together, that at least as regards freemen, one can scarcely distinguish who is Norman and who English. . . . The villeins attached to the soil," he says again, "are alone of pure Saxon blood."

the favour with which they cherished the daring and rebellion of outlaws. There were Saxon families at the end of the twelfth century, who had bound themselves by a perpetual vow, to wear long beards from father to son in memory of the national custom and of the old country. Such men, even though fallen to the condition of socagers, even sunk into villeins, had a stiffer neck than the wretched colonists of the Continent, trodden down and moulded by four centuries of Roman taxation. By their feelings as well as by their condition, they were the broken remains, but also the living elements, of a free people. They did not suffer the extremities of oppression. They constituted the body of the nation, the laborious, courageous body which supplied its energy. The great barons felt that they must rely upon them in their resistance to the king. Very soon, in stipulating for themselves, they stipulated for all freemen,[1] even for merchants and villeins. Thereafter "No merchant shall be dispossessed of his merchandise, no villein of the instruments of his labour; no freeman, merchant, or villein shall be taxed unreasonably for a small crime; no freeman shall be arrested, or imprisoned, or disseised of his land, or outlawed, or destroyed in any manner, but by the lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land." Thus protected they raise themselves and act. In each county there was a court, where all freeholders, small or great, came to deliberate about the municipal affairs, administer justice, and appoint tax-assessors. The red-bearded Saxon, with his clear complexion and great white teeth, came and sate by the Norman's side; these were franklins like the one whom Chaucer describes:

[1] Magna Charta, 1215.

" A Frankelein was in this compagnie ;
White was his berd, as is the dayesie.
Of his complexion he was sanguin,
Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in win.
To liven in delit was ever his wone,
For he was Epicures owen sone,
That held opinion that plein delit
Was verily felicite parfite.
An housholder, and that a grete was he,
Seint Julian he was in his contree.
His brede, his ale, was alway after on ;
A better envyned man was no wher non.
Withouten bake mete never was his hous,
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,
It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,
Of all deintees that men coud of thinke ;
After the sondry sesons of the yere,
So changed he his mete and his soupere.
Ful many a fat partrich had he in mewe,
And many a breme, and many a luce in stewe.
Wo was his coke but if his sauce were
Poinant and sharpe, and redy all his gere.
His table, dormant in his halle alway
Stode redy covered alle the longe day.
At sessions ther was he lord and sire.
Ful often time he was knight of the shire.
An anelace and a gipciere all of silk,
Heng at his girdle, white as morwe milk.
A shereve hadde he ben, and a contour.
Was no wher swiche a worthy vavasour." [1]

With him occasionally in the assembly, oftenest among the audience, were the yeomen, farmers, foresters, tradesmen, his fellow-countrymen, muscular and resolute

[1] *Chaucer's Works*, ed. Sir H. Nicholas, 6 vols., 1845, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 11, *l.* 333.

men, not slow in the defence of their property, and in supporting him who would take their cause in hand, with voice, fist, and weapons. Is it likely that the discontent of such men to whom the following description applies could be overlooked?

"The Miller was a stout carl for the nones,
Ful bigge he was of braun and eke of bones;
That proved wel, for over all ther he came,
At wrastling he wold bere away the ram.
He was short shuldered brode, a thikke gnarre,
Ther n'as no dore, that he n'olde heve of barre,
Or breke it at a renning with his hede.
His berd as any sowe or fox was rede,
And therto brode, as though it were a spade.
Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A wert, and thereon stode a tufte of heres,
Rede as the bristles of a sowes eres:
His nose-thirles blacke were and wide.
A swerd and bokeler bare he by his side.
His mouth as wide was as a forneis,
He was a jangler and a goliardeis,
And that was most of sinne, and harlotries.
Wel coude he stelen corne and tollen thries.
And yet he had a thomb of gold parde.
A white cote and a blew hode wered he.
A baggepipe wel coude he blowe and soune,
And therwithall he brought us out of toune."[1]

Those are the athletic forms, the square build, the jolly John Bulls of the period, such as we yet find them, nourished by meat and porter, sustained by bodily exercise and boxing. These are the men we must keep before us, if we will understand how political liberty

[1] *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 17, *l.* 547.

has been established in this country. Gradually they find the simple knights, their colleagues in the county court, too poor to be present with the great barons at the royal assemblies, coalescing with them. They become united by community of interests, by similarity of manners, by nearness of condition; they take them for their representatives, they elect them.[1] They have now entered upon public life, and the advent of a new reinforcement, gives them a perpetual standing in their changed condition. The towns laid waste by the Conquest are gradually repeopled. They obtain or exact charters; the townsmen buy themselves out of the arbitrary taxes that were imposed on them; they get possession of the land on which their houses are built; they unite themselves under mayors and aldermen. Each town now, within the meshes of the great feudal net, is a power. The Earl of Leicester, rebelling against the king, summons two burgesses from each town to Parliament,[2] to authorise and support him. From that time the conquered race, both in country and town, rose to political life. If they were taxed, it was with their consent; they paid nothing which they did not agree to. Early in the fourteenth century their united deputies composed the House of Commons; and already, at the close of the preceding century, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in the name of the king, said to the pope, "It is the custom of the kingdom of England, that in all affairs relating to the state of this kingdom, the advice of all who are interested in them should be taken."

[1] From 1214, and also in 1225 and 1254. Guizot, *Origin of the Representative System in England*, pp. 297–299.

[2] In 1264.

VII.

If they have acquired liberties, it is because they have obtained them by force; circumstances have assisted, but character has done more. The protection of the great barons and the alliance of the plain knights have strengthened them; but it was by their native roughness and energy that they maintained their independence. Look at the contrast they offer at this moment to their neighbours. What occupies the mind of the French people? The fabliaux, the naughty tricks of Reynard, the art of deceiving Master Isengrin, of stealing his wife, of cheating him out of his dinner, of getting him beaten by a third party without danger to one's self; in short, the triumph of poverty and cleverness over power united to folly. The popular hero is already the artful plebeian, chaffing, light-hearted, who, later on, will ripen into Panurge and Figaro, not apt to withstand you to your face, too sharp to care for great victories and habits of strife, inclined by the nimbleness of his wit to dodge round an obstacle; if he but touch a man with the tip of his finger, that man tumbles into the trap. But here we have other customs: it is Robin Hood, a valiant outlaw, living free and bold in the green forest, waging frank and open war against sheriff and law.[1] If ever a man was popular in his country, it was he. "It is he," says an old historian, "whom the common people love so dearly to celebrate in games and comedies, and whose history, sung by fiddlers, interests them more than any other." In the sixteenth century he still had his commemoration day, observed by all the people in the small towns and in the country. Bishop Latimer, making his pastoral tour, announced

[1] Aug. Thierry, iv. 56. Ritson's *Robin Hood*, 1832.

one day that he would preach in a certain place. On the morrow, proceeding to the church, he found the doors closed, and waited more than an hour before they brought him the key. At last a man came and said to him, "Syr, thys ys a busye day with us; we cannot heare you: it is Robyn Hoodes Daye. The parishe are gone abrode to gather for Robyn Hoode. . . . I was fayne there to geve place to Robyn Hoode."[1] The bishop was obliged to divest himself of his ecclesiastical garments and proceed on his journey, leaving his place to archers dressed in green, who played on a rustic stage the parts of Robin Hood, Little John, and their band. In fact, he was the national hero. Saxon in the first place, and waging war against the men of law, against bishops and archbishops, whose sway was so heavy; generous, moreover, giving to a poor ruined knight clothes, horse, and money to buy back the land he had pledged to a rapacious abbot; compassionate too, and kind to the poor, enjoining his men not to injure yeomen and labourers; but above all rash, bold, proud, who would go and draw his bow before the sheriff's eyes and to his face; ready with blows, whether to give or take. He slew fourteen out of fifteen foresters who came to arrest him; he slays the sheriff, the judge, the town gatekeeper; he is ready to slay as many more as like to come; and all this joyously, jovially, like an honest fellow who eats well, has a hard skin, lives in the open air, and revels in animal life.

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne,
And leves be large and long,
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song."

[1] Latimer's *Sermons*, ed. Arber, 6th Sermon, 1869, p. 173.

That is how many ballads begin; and the fine weather which makes the stags and oxen butt with their horns, inspires them with the thought of exchanging blows with sword or stick. Robin dreamed that two yeomen were thrashing him, and he wants to go and find them, angrily repelling Little John, who offers to go first:

"Ah John, by me thou settest noe store,
And that I farley finde:
How offt send I my men before,
And tarry myselfe behinde?

"It is no cunnin a knave to ken,
An a man but heare him speake;
An it were not for bursting of my bowe,
John, I thy head wold breake."[1] . . .

He goes alone, and meets the robust yeoman, Guy of Gisborne:

"He that had neyther beene kythe nor kin,
Might have seen a full fayre fight,
To see how together these yeomen went
With blades both browne and bright,

"To see how these yeomen together they fought
Two howres of a summer's day;
Yett neither Robin Hood nor sir Guy
Them fettled to flye away."[2]

You see Guy the yeoman is as brave as Robin Hood; he came to seek him in the wood, and drew the bow almost as well as he. This old popular poetry is not the praise of a single bandit, but of an entire class, the yeomanry. "God haffe mersey on Robin Hodys solle,

[1] Ritson, *Robin Hood Ballads*, i. iv. *v.* 41–48.
[2] *Ibid. v.* 145–152.

and saffe all god yemanry." That is how many ballads end. The brave yeoman, inured to blows, a good archer, clever at sword and stick, is the favourite. There were also redoubtable, armed townsfolk, accustomed to make use of their arms. Here they are at work:

" ' O that were a shame,' said jolly Robin,
' We being three, and thou but one,'
The pinder[1] leapt back then thirty good foot,
'Twas thirty good foot and one.

" He leaned his back fast unto a thorn,
And his foot against a stone,
And there he fought a long summer's day,
A summer's day so long.

" Till that their swords on their broad bucklers
Were broke fast into their hands." [2]

Often even Robin does not get the advantage:

" ' I pass not for length," bold Arthur reply'd,
' My staff is of oke so free;
Eight foot and a half, it will knock down a calf,
And I hope it will knock down thee.'

" Then Robin could no longer forbear,
He gave him such a knock,
Quickly and soon the blood came down
Before it was ten a clock.

" Then Arthur he soon recovered himself,
And gave him such a knock on the crown,
That from every side of bold Robin Hood's head
The blood came trickling down.

[1] A pinder's task was to pin the sheep in the fold, cattle in the pen-fold or pound (Richardson).—TR.

[2] Ritson, ii. 3, *v.* 17–26.

" Then Robin raged like a wild boar,
As soon as he saw his own blood :
Then Bland was in hast, he laid on so fast,
As though he had been cleaving of wood.

" And about and about and about they went,
Like two wild bores in a chase,
Striving to aim each other to maim,
Leg, arm, or any other place.

" And knock for knock they lustily dealt,
Which held for two hours and more,
Till all the wood rang at every bang,
They ply'd their work so sore.

" ' Hold thy hand, hold thy hand,' said Robin Hood,
And let thy quarrel fall ;
For here we may thrash our bones all to mesh,
And get no coyn at all.

" ' And in the forrest of merry Sherwood,
Hereafter thou shalt be free.'
' God a mercy for nought, my freedom I bought,
I may thank my staff, and not thee.' " [1] . .

" Who are you, then ? " says Robin :

" ' I am a tanner,' bold Arthur reply'd,
' In Nottingham long I have wrought ;
And if thou'lt come there, I vow and swear,
I will tan thy hide for nought.' "

" ' God a mercy, good fellow,' said jolly Robin,
' Since thou art so kind and free ;
And if thou wilt tan my hide for nought,
I will do as much for thee.' " [2]

[1] Ritson, ii. 6, *v.* 58–89. [2] *Ibid. v.* 94-101.

With these generous offers, they embrace; a free exchange of honest blows always prepares the way for friendship. It was so Robin Hood tried Little John, whom he loved all his life after. Little John was seven feet high, and being on a bridge, would not give way. Honest Robin would not use his bow against him, but went and cut a stick seven feet long; and they agreed amicably to fight on the bridge until one should fall into the water. They fall to so merrily that "their bones ring." In the end Robin falls, and he feels only the more respect for Little John. Another time, having a sword with him, he was thrashed by a tinker who had only a stick. Full of admiration, he gives him a hundred pounds. Again he was thrashed by a potter, who refused him toll; then by a shepherd. They fight to wile away time. Even now-a-days boxers give each other a friendly grip before setting to; they knock one another about in this country honourably, without malice, fury, or shame. Broken teeth, black eyes, smashed ribs, do not call for murderous vengeance: it would seem that the bones are more solid and the nerves less sensitive in England than elsewhere. Blows once exchanged, they take each other by the hand, and dance together on the green grass;

> "Then Robin took them both by the hands,
> And danc'd round about the oke tree.
> 'For three merry men, and three merry men,
> And three merry men we be.'"

Moreover, these people, in each parish, practised the bow every Sunday, and were the best archers in the world; from the close of the fourteenth century the general emancipation of the villeins multiplied

their number greatly, and you can now understand how, amidst all the operations and changes of the great central powers, the liberty of the subject survived. After all, the only permanent and unalterable guarantee, in every country and under every constitution, is this unspoken declaration in the heart of the mass of the people, which is well understood on all sides: "If any man touches my property, enters my house, obstructs or molests me, let him beware. I have patience, but I have also strong arms, good comrades, a good blade, and, on occasion, a firm resolve, happen what may, to plunge my blade up to its hilt in his throat."

VIII.

Thus thought Sir John Fortescue, Chancellor of England under Henry VI., exiled in France during the Wars of the Roses, one of the oldest prose-writers, and the first who weighed and explained the constitution of his country.[1] He says:

"It is cowardise and lack of hartes and corage that kepeth the Frenchmen from rysyng, and not povertye;[2] which corage no Frenche man hath like to the English man. It hath ben often seen in Englond that iij or iv thefes, for povertie, hath sett upon vij or viij true men, and robbyd them al. But it hath not ben seen in Fraunce, that vij or viij thefes have ben hardy to robbe iij or iv true men. Wherfor it is right seld that Frenchmen be hangyd for robberye, for that they have no hertys to do so terryble an acte. There be therfor mo men

[1] *The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*—A *learned Commendation of the Politic Laws of England* (Latin). I frequently quote from the second work, which is more full and complete.

[2] The courage which finds utterance here is coarse; the English instincts are combative and independent. The French race, and the Gauls generally, are perhaps the most reckless of life of any.

hangyd in Englond, in a yere, for robberye and manslaughter, than ther be hangid in Fraunce for such cause of crime in vij yers."[1]

This throws a startling and terrible light on the violent condition of this armed community, where sudden attacks are an everyday matter, and every one, rich and poor, lives with his hand on his sword. There were great bands of malefactors under Edward I., who infested the country, and fought with those who came to seize them. The inhabitants of the towns were obliged to gather together with those of the neighbouring towns, with hue and cry, to pursue and capture them. Under Edward III. there were barons who rode about with armed escorts and archers, seizing the manors, carrying off ladies and girls of high degree, mutilating, killing, extorting ransoms from people in their own houses, as if they were in an enemy's land, and sometimes coming before the judges at the sessions in such guise and in so great force that the judges were afraid and dared not administer justice.[2] Read the letters of the Paston family, under Henry VI. and Edward IV., and you will see how private war was at every door, how it was necessary for a man to provide himself with men and arms, to be on the alert for defence of his property, to be self-reliant, to depend on his own strength and courage. It is this excess of vigour and readiness to fight which, after their victories in France, set them against one another in England, in the butcheries of the Wars of

[1] *The Difference*, etc., 3d ed. 1724, ch. xiii. p. 98. There are now-a-days in France 42 highway robberies as against 738 in England. In 1843, there were in England four times as many accusations of crimes and offences as in France, having regard to the number of inhabitants (*Moreau de Jonnès*).

[2] Statute of Winchester, 1285; Ordinance of 1378.

the Roses. The strangers who saw them were astonished at their bodily strength and courage, at the great pieces of beef "which feed their muscles, at their military habits, their fierce obstinacy, as of savage beasts."[1] They are like their bulldogs, an untameable race, who in their mad courage "cast themselves with shut eyes into the den of a Russian bear, and get their head broken like a rotten apple." This strange condition of a militant community, so full of danger, and requiring so much effort, does not make them afraid. King Edward having given orders to send disturbers of the peace to prison without legal proceedings, and not to liberate them, on bail or otherwise, the Commons declared the order "horribly vexatious;" resist it, refuse to be too much protected. Less peace, but more independence. They maintain the guarantees of the subject at the expense of public security, and prefer turbulent liberty to arbitrary order. Better suffer marauders whom they could fight, than magistrates under whom they would have to bend.

This proud and persistent notion gives rise to, and fashions Fortescue's whole work:

"Ther be two kynds of kyngdomys, of the which that one ys a lordship callid in Latyne Dominium regale, and that other is callid Dominium politicum et regale."

The first is established in France, and the second in England.

"And they dyversen in that the first may rule his people by such lawys as he makyth hymself, and therefor, he may set upon them talys, and other impositions, such as he wyl hymself, with-

[1] Benvenuto Cellini, quoted by Froude, i. 20, *Hist. of England.* Shakspeare, *Henry V.* : conversation of French lords before the battle of Agincourt.

out their assent. The secund may not rule hys people by other laws than such as they assenten unto; and therfor he may set upon them non impositions without their own assent." [1]

In a state like this, the will of the people is the prime element of life. Sir John Fortescue says further:

"A king of England cannot at his pleasure make any alterations in the laws of the land, for the nature of his government is not only regal, but political."

"In the body politic, the first thing which lives and moves is the intention of the people, having in it the blood, that is, the prudential care and provision for the public good, which it transmits and communicates to the head, as to the principal part, and to all the rest of the members of the said body politic, whereby it subsists and is invigorated. The law under which the people is incorporated may be compared to the nerves or sinews of the body natural. . . . And as the bones and all the other members of the body preserve their functions and discharge their several offices by the nerves, so do the members of the community by the law. And as the head of the body natural cannot change its nerves, or sinews, cannot deny to the several parts their proper energy, their due proportion and aliment of blood, neither can a king who is the head of the body politic change the laws thereof, nor take from the people what is theirs by right, against their consents. . . . For he is appointed to protect his subjects in their lives, properties, and laws, for this very end and purpose he has the delegation of power from the people."

Here we have all the ideas of Locke in the fifteenth century; so powerful is practice to suggest theory! so quickly does man discover, in the enjoyment of liberty, the nature of liberty! Fortescue goes further; he contrasts, step by step, the Roman law, that inheritance of all

[1] *The Difference*, etc., p. i.

Latin peoples, with the English law, that heritage of all Teutonic peoples: one the work of absolute princes, and tending altogether to the sacrifice of the individual; the other the work of the common will, tending altogether to protect the person. He contrasts the maxims of the imperial jurisconsults, who accord "force of law to all which is determined by the prince," with the statutes of England, which "are not enacted by the sole will of the prince, . . . but with the concurrent consent of the whole kingdom, by their representatives in Parliament, . . . more than three hundred select persons." He contrasts the arbitrary nomination of imperial officers with the election of the sheriff, and says:

"There is in every county a certain officer, called the king's sheriff, who, amongst other duties of his office, executes within his county all mandates and judgments of the king's courts of justice: he is an annual officer; and it is not lawful for him, after the expiration of his year, to continue to act in his said office, neither shall he be taken in again to execute the said office within two years thence next ensuing. The manner of his election is thus: Every year, on the morrow of All-Souls, there meet in the King's Court of Exchequer all the king's counsellors, as well lords spiritual and temporal, as all other the king's justices, all the barons of the Exchequer, the Master of the Rolls, and certain other officers, when all of them, by common consent, nominate three of every county knights or esquires, persons of distinction, and such as they esteem fittest qualified to bear the office of sheriff of that county for the year ensuing. The king only makes choice of one out of the three so nominated and returned, who, in virtue of the king's letters patent, is constituted High Sheriff of that county."

He contrasts the Roman procedure, which is satisfied

with two witnesses to condemn a man, with the jury, the three permitted challenges, the admirable guarantees of justice with which the uprightness, number, repute, and condition of the juries surround the sentence. About the juries he says :

" Twelve good and true men being sworn, as in the manner above related, legally qualified, that is, having, over and besides their moveables, possessions in land sufficient, as was said, wherewith to maintain their rank and station ; neither inspected by, nor at variance with either of the parties ; all of the neighbourhood ; there shall be read to them, in English, by the Court, the record and nature of the plea." [1]

Thus protected, the English commons cannot be other than flourishing. Consider, on the other hand, he says to the young prince whom he is instructing, the condition of the commons in France. By their taxes, tax on salt, on wine, billeting of soldiers, they are reduced to great misery. You have seen them on your travels. . . .

" The same Commons be so impoverishid and distroyyd, that they may unneth lyve. Thay drink water, thay eate apples, with bred right brown made of rye. They eate no fleshe, but if it be selden, a litill larde, or of the entrails or heds of bests sclayne for the nobles and merchants of the land. They weryn no wollyn, but if it be a pore cote under their uttermost garment, made of grete canvass, and cal it a frok. Their hosyn be of like canvas, and passen not their knee, wherfor they be gartrid and their thyghs bare. Their wifs and children gone bare fote.

[1] The original of this very famous treatise, *de Laudibus Legum Angliæ*, was written in Latin between 1464 and 1470, first published in 1537, and translated into English in 1775 by Francis Gregor. I have taken these extracts from the magnificent edition of Sir John Fortescue's works published in 1869 for private distribution, and edited by Thomas Fortescue, Lord Clermont. Some of the pieces quoted, left in the old spelling, are taken from an older edition, translated by Robert Mulcaster in 1567.—TR.

. . . For sum of them, that was wonte to pay to his lord for his tenement which he hyrith by the year a scute payth now to the kyng, over that scute, fyve skuts. Wher thrugh they be artyd by necessite so to watch, labour and grub in the ground for their sustenance, that their nature is much wasted, and the kynd of them brought to nowght. Thay gone crokyd and ar feeble, not able to fight nor to defend the realm; nor they have wepon, nor monye to buy them wepon withal. . . . This is the frute first of hyre Jus regale. . . . But blessed be God, this land ys rulid under a better lawe, and therfor the people therof be not in such penurye, nor therby hurt in their persons, but they be wealthie and have all things necessarie to the sustenance of nature. Wherefore they be myghty and able to resyste the adversaries of the realms that do or will do them wrong. Loo, this is the frut of Jus politicum et regale, under which we lyve."[1] "Everye inhabiter of the realme of England useth and enjoyeth at his pleasure all the fruites that his land or cattel beareth, with al the profits and commodities which by his owne travayle, or by the labour of others, hae gaineth; not hindered by the iniurie or wrong deteinement of anye man, but that hee shall bee allowed a reasonable recompence.[2] . . . Hereby it commeth to passe that the men of that lande are riche, havyng aboundaunce of golde and silver, and other thinges necessarie for the maintenaunce of man's life. They drinke no water, unless it be so, that some for devotion, and uppon a zeale of penaunce, doe abstaine from other drinks. They eate plentifully of all kindes of fleshe and fishe. They weare fine woollen cloth in all their apparel; they have also aboundaunce of bed-coveringes in their houses, and of all other woollen stuffe. They have greate store of all hustlementes and implementes of householde, they are plentifully furnished with al instruments of husbandry, and all other things that are requisite to the accomplishment of a quiet and wealthy lyfe, according to their estates and degrees. Neither

[1] *Of an Absolute and Limited Monarchy*, 3d ed., 1724, ch. iii. p. 15.

[2] Commines bears the same testimony.

are they sued in the lawe, but onely before ordinary iudges, where by the lawes of the lande they are iustly intreated. Neither are they arrested or impleaded for their moveables or possessions, or arraigned of any offence, bee it never so great and outragious, but after the lawes of the land, and before the iudges aforesaid."[1]

All this arises from the constitution of the country and the distribution of the land. Whilst in other countries we find only a population of paupers, with here and there a few lords, England is covered and filled with owners of lands and fields; so that "therein so small a thorpe cannot bee founde, wherein dwelleth not a knight, an esquire, or suche a housholder as is there commonly called a franklayne, enryched with greate possessions. And also other freeholders, and many yeomen able for their livelodes to make a jurye in fourme afore-mentioned. For there bee in that lande divers yeomen, which are able to dispend by the yeare above a hundred poundes."[2] Harrison says:[3]

[1] *De Laudibus*, etc., ch. xxxvi.

[2] "The might of the realme most stondyth upon archers which be not rich men." Compare Hallam, ii. 482. All this takes us back as far as the Conquest, and farther. "It is reasonable to suppose that the greater part of those who appear to have possessed small freeholds or parcels of manors were no other than the original nation. . . . A respectable class of free socagers, having in general full right of alienating their lands, and holding them probably at a small certain rent from the lord of the manor, frequently occurs in the Domesday Book." At all events, there were in Domesday Book Saxons "perfectly exempt from villenage." This class is mentioned with respect in the treatises of Glanvil and Bracton. As for the villeins, they were quickly liberated in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, either by their own energies or by becoming copyholders. The Wars of the Roses still further raised the commons; orders were frequently issued, previous to a battle, to slay the nobles and spare the commoners.

[3] *Description of England*, 275.

"This sort of people, have more estimation than labourers and the common sort of artificers, and these commonlie live wealthilie, keepe good houses, and travell to get riches. They are for the most part farmers to gentlemen," and keep servants of their own. "These were they that in times past made all France afraid. And albeit they be not called master, as gentlemen are, or sir, as to knights apperteineth, but onelie John and Thomas, etc., yet have they beene found to have done verie good service; and the kings of England, in foughten battels, were wont to remaine among them (who were their footmen) as the French kings did among their horssemen: the prince thereby showing where his chiefe strength did consist."

Such men, says Fortescue, might form a legal jury, and vote, resist, be associated, do everything wherein a free government consists: for they were numerous in every district; they were not down-trodden like the timid peasants of France; they had their honour and that of their family to maintain; "they be well provided with arms; they remember that they have won battles in France."[1] Such is the class, still obscure, but more

[1] The following is a portrait of a yeoman, by Latimer, in the first sermon preached before Edward VI., 8th March 1549: "My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own; only he had a farm of £3 or £4 by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half-a-dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse; while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the King's Majesty now. He married my sisters with £5 or 20 nobles a-piece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God; he kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor; and all this did he of the said farm. Where he that now hath it payeth £16 by the year, or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor."

This is from the sixth sermon, preached before the young king, 12th

rich and powerful every century, which, founded by the down-trodden Saxon aristocracy, and sustained by the surviving Saxon character, ended, under the lead of the inferior Norman nobility, and under the patronage of the superior Norman nobility, in establishing and settling a free constitution, and a nation worthy of liberty.

IX.

When, as here, men are endowed with a serious character, have a resolute spirit, and possess independent habits, they deal with their conscience as with their daily business, and end by laying hands on church as well as state. Already for a long time the exactions of the Roman See had provoked the resistance of the people,[1] and the higher clergy became unpopular. Men complained that the best livings were given by the Pope to non-resident strangers; that some Italian, unknown in England, possessed fifty or sixty benefices in England; that English money poured into Rome; and that the clergy, being judged only by clergy, gave themselves up to their vices, and abused their state of immunity. In the first years of Henry III.'s reign there were nearly a hundred murders committed by priests then alive. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the ecclesiastical revenue was twelve

April 1549: "In my time my poor father was as diligent to teach me to shoot as to learn (me) any other thing; and so, I think, other men did their children. He taught me how to draw, how to lay my body in my bow, and not to draw with strength of arms, as other nations do, but with strength of the body. I had my bows bought me according to my age and strength; as I increased in them, so my bows were made bigger and bigger; for men shall never shoot well except they be brought up in it. It is a goodly art, a wholesome kind of exercise, and much commended in physic."

[1] In 1246, 1376. Thierry, iii. 79.

times greater than the civil; about half the soil was in the hands of the clergy. At the end of the century the commons declared that the taxes paid to the church were five times greater than the taxes paid to the crown; and some years afterwards,[1] considering that the wealth of the clergy only served to keep them in idleness and luxury, they proposed to confiscate it for the public benefit. Already the idea of the Reformation had forced itself upon them. They remembered how in the ballads Robin Hood ordered his folk to spare the yeomen, labourers, even knights, if they are good fellows, but never to let abbots or bishops escape. The prelates were grievously oppressing the people by means of their privileges, ecclesiastical courts, and tithes; when suddenly, amid the pleasant banter or the monotonous babble of the Norman versifiers, we hear the indignant voice of a Saxon, a man of the people and a victim of oppression, thundering against them.

It is the vision of Piers Ploughman, written, it is supposed, by a secular priest of Oxford.[2] Doubtless the traces of French taste are perceptible. It could not be otherwise: the people from below can never quite prevent themselves from imitating the people above; and the most unshackled popular poets, Burns and Béranger, too often preserve an academic style. So here a fashionable machinery, the allegory of the Roman de la Rose, is pressed into service. We have Do-well, Covetousness, Avarice, Simony, Conscience, and a whole world of talking abstractions. But, in spite of these

[1] 1404–1409. The commons declared that with these revenues the king would be able to maintain 15 earls, 1500 knights, 6200 squires, and 100 hospitals: each earl receiving annually 300 marks; each knight 100 marks, and the produce of four ploughed lands; each squire 40 marks, and the produce of two ploughed lands.

[2] About 1362.

vain foreign phantoms, the body of the poem is national and true to life. The old language reappears in part; the old metre altogether, no more rhymes, but barbarous alliterations; no more jesting, but a harsh gravity, a sustained invective, a grand and sombre imagination, heavy Latin texts, hammered down as by a Protestant hand. Piers Ploughman went to sleep on the Malvern hills, and there had a wonderful dream:

"Thanne gan I meten—a merveillous swevene,
That I was in a wildernesse—wiste I nevere where;
And as I biheeld into the eest,—an heigh to the sonne,
I seigh a tour on a toft,—trieliche y-maked,
A deep dale bynethe—a dongeon thereinne
With depe diches and derke—and dredfulle of sighte.
A fair feeld ful of folk—fond I ther bitwene,
Of alle manere of men,—the meene and the riche,
Werchynge and wandrynge—as the world asketh.
Some putten hem to the plough,—pleiden ful selde,
In settynge and sowynge—swonken ful harde,
And wonnen that wastours—with glotonye dystruyeth."[1]

A gloomy picture of the world, like the frightful dreams which occur so often in Albert Durer and Luther. The first reformers were persuaded that the earth was given over to evil; that the devil had on it his empire and his officers; that Antichrist, seated on the throne of Rome, displayed ecclesiastical pomps to seduce souls and cast them into the fire of hell. So here Antichrist, with raised banner, enters a convent; bells are rung; monks in solemn procession go to meet him, and receive with congratulations their lord and father.[2] With seven

[1] *Piers Ploughman's Vision and Creed*, ed. T. Wright, 1856, i. p. 2, *l.* 21–44.

[2] The Archdeacon of Richmond, on his tour in 1216, came to the priory of Bridlington with ninety-seven horses, twenty-one dogs, and three falcons.

great giants, the seven deadly sins, he besieges Conscience; and the assault is led by Idleness, who brings with her an army of more than a thousand prelates: for vices reign, more hateful from being in holy places, and employed in the church of God in the devil's service:

"Ac now is Religion a rydere—a romere aboute,
A ledere of love-dayes—and a lond-buggere,
A prikere on a palfrey—fro manere to manere. . . .
And but if his knave knele—that shal his coppe brynge,
He loureth on hym, and asketh hym—who taughte hym curteisie."[1]

But this sacrilegious show has its day, and God puts His hand on men in order to warn them. By order of Conscience, Nature sends forth a host of plagues and diseases from the planets:

"Kynde Conscience tho herde,—and cam out of the planetes,
And sente forth his forreyours—feveres and fluxes,
Coughes and cardiacles,—crampes and tooth-aches,
Reumes and radegundes,—and roynous scabbes,
Biles and bocches,—and brennynge agues,
Frenesies and foule yveles,—forageres of kynde. . . .
There was 'Harrow! and Help!—Here cometh Kynde!
With Deeth that is dredful—to undo us alle!'
The lord that lyved after lust—tho aloud cryde. . . .
Deeth cam dryvynge after,—and al to duste passhed
Kynges and knyghtes,—kaysers and popes, . . .
Manye a lovely lady—and lemmans of knyghtes,
Swowned and swelted for sorwe of hise dyntes."[2]

Here is a crowd of miseries, like those which Milton has described in his vision of human life; tragic pictures

[1] *Piers Ploughman's Vision*, i. p. 191, *l.* 6217–6228.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. Last book, p. 430, *l.* 14,084–14,135.

and emotions, such as the reformers delight to dwell upon. There is a like speech delivered by John Knox, before the fair ladies of Mary Stuart, which tears the veil from the human corpse just as coarsely, in order to exhibit its shame. The conception of the world, proper to the people of the north, all sad and moral, shows itself already. They are never comfortable in their country; they have to strive continually against cold or rain. They cannot live there carelessly, lying under a lovely sky, in a sultry and clear atmosphere, their eyes filled with the noble beauty and happy serenity of the land. They must work to live; be attentive, exact, keep their houses wind and water tight, trudge doggedly through the mud behind their plough, light their lamps in their shops during the day. Their climate imposes endless inconvenience, and exacts endless endurance. Hence arise melancholy and the idea of duty. Man naturally thinks of life as of a battle, oftener of black death which closes this deadly show, and leads so many plumed and disorderly processions to the silence and the eternity of the grave. *All this visible world is vain; there is nothing true but human virtue,—the courageous energy with which man attains to self-command, the generous energy with which he employs himself in the service of others.* On this view, then, his eyes are fixed; they pierce through worldly gauds, neglect sensual joys, to attain this. By such inner thoughts and feelings the ideal model is displaced; a new source of action springs up—the idea of righteousness. What sets them against ecclesiastical pomp and insolence, is neither the envy of the poor and low, nor the anger of the oppressed, nor a revolutionary desire to experimentalise abstract truth, but conscience. They tremble lest they should not work out their salvation if

they continue in a corrupt church; they fear the menaces of God, and dare not embark on the great journey with unsafe guides. "What is righteousness?" asked Luther anxiously, "and how shall I obtain it?" With like anxiety Piers Ploughman goes to seek Do-well, and asks each one to show him where he shall find him. "With us," say the friars. "Contra quath ich, *Septies in die cadit justus*, and ho so syngeth certys doth nat wel;" so he betakes himself to "study and writing," like Luther; the clerks at table speak much of God and of the Trinity, "and taken Bernarde to witnesse, and putteth forth presompcions . . . ac the carful mai crie and quaken atte gate, bothe a fyngred and a furst, and for defaute spille ys non so hende to have hym yn. Clerkus and knyghtes carpen of God ofte, and haveth hym muche in hure mouthe, ac mene men in herte;" and heart, inner faith, living virtue, are what constitute true religion. This is what these dull Saxons had begun to discover. The Teutonic conscience, and English good sense too, had been aroused, as well as individual energy, the resolution to judge and to decide alone, by and for one's self. "Christ is our hede that sitteth on hie, Heddis ne ought we have no mo," says a poem, attributed to Chaucer, and which, with others, claims independence for Christian consciences.[1]

> "We ben his membres bothe also,
> Father he taught us call him all,
> Maisters to call forbad he tho;
> Al maisters ben wickid and fals."

No other mediator between man and God. In vain the doctors state that they have authority for their words;

[1] *Piers Plowman's Crede; the Plowman's Tale*, first printed in 1550. There were three editions in one year, it was so manifestly Protestant.

there is a word of greater authority, to wit, God's. We hear it in the fourteenth century, this grand "word of God." It quitted the learned schools, the dead languages, the dusty shelves on which the clergy suffered it to sleep, covered with a confusion of commentators and Fathers.[1] Wiclif appeared and translated it like Luther, and in a spirit similar to Luther's. "Cristen men and wymmen, olde and yonge, shulden studie fast in the Newe Testament, for it is of ful autorite, and opyn to undirstonding of simple men, as to the poyntis that be moost nedeful to salvacioun."[2] Religion must be secular, in order to escape from the hands of the clergy, who monopolise it; each must hear and read for himself the word of God: he will then be sure that it has not been corrupted; he will feel it better, and more, he will understand it better; for

"ech place of holy writ, both opyn and derk, techith mekenes and charite; and therfore he that kepith mekenes and charite hath the trewe undirstondyng and perfectioun of al holi writ. . . . Therfore no simple man of wit be aferd unmesurabli to studie in the text of holy writ . . . and no clerk be proude of the verrey undirstondyng of holy writ, for whi undirstonding of hooly writ with outen charite that kepith Goddis heestis, makith a man depper dampned . . . and pride and covetise of clerkis is cause of her blindees and eresie, and priveth them fro verrey undirstondyng of holy writ."[3]

[1] Knighton, about 1400, wrote thus of Wiclif: "Transtulit de Latino in anglicam linguam, non angelicam. Unde per ipsum fit vulgare, et magis apertum laicis et mulieribus legere scientibus quam solet esse clericis admodum litteratis, et bene intelligentibus. Et sic evangelica margerita spargitur et a porcis conculcatur . . . (ita) ut laicis commune æternum quod ante fuerat clericis et ecclesiæ doctoribus talentum supernum."

[2] Wiclif's Bible, ed. Forshall and Madden, 1850, preface to Oxford edition, p. 2.

[3] *Ibid.*

These are the memorable words that began to circulate in the markets and in the schools. They read the translated Bible, and commented on it; they judged the existing Church after it. What judgments these serious and untainted minds passed upon it, with what readiness they pushed on to the true religion of their race, we may see from their petition to Parliament.[1] One hundred and thirty years before Luther, they said that the pope was not established by Christ, that pilgrimages and image-worship were akin to idolatry, that external rites are of no importance, that priests ought not to possess temporal wealth, that the doctrine of transubstantiation made a people idolatrous, that priests have not the power of absolving from sin. In proof of all this they brought forward texts of Scripture. Fancy these brave spirits, simple and strong souls, who began to read at night in their shops, by candle-light; for they were shopkeepers—tailors, skinners, and bakers —who, with some men of letters, began to read, and then to believe, and finally got themselves burned.[2] What a sight for the fifteenth century, and what a promise! It seems as though, with liberty of action, liberty of mind begins to appear; that these common folk will think and speak; that under the conventional literature, imitated from France, a new literature is dawning; and that England, genuine England, half-mute since the Conquest, will at last find a voice.

She had not yet found it. King and peers ally themselves to the Church, pass terrible statutes, destroy books, burn heretics alive, often with refinement of torture,—one in a barrel, another hung by an iron chain

[1] In 1395.

[2] 1401, William Sawtré, the first Lollard burned alive.

round his waist. The temporal wealth of the clergy had been attacked, and therewith the whole English constitution; and the great establishment above crushed out with its whole weight the revolutionists from below. Darkly, in silence, while the nobles were destroying each other in the Wars of the Roses, the commons went on working and living, separating themselves from the established Church, maintaining their liberties, amassing wealth, but not going further.[1] Like a vast rock which underlies the soil, yet crops up here and there at distant intervals, they barely show themselves. No great poetical or religious work displays them to the light. They sang; but their ballads, first ignored, then transformed, reach us only in a late edition. They prayed; but beyond one or two indifferent poems, their incomplete and repressed doctrine bore no fruit. We may well see from the verse, tone, and drift of their ballads, that they are capable of the finest poetic originality,[2] but their poetry is in the hands of yeomen and harpers. We perceive, by the precocity and energy of their religious protests, that they are capable of the most severe and impassioned creeds; but their faith remains hidden in the shop-parlours of a few obscure sectaries. Neither their faith nor their poetry has been

[1] Commines, v. ch. 19 and 20: "In my opinion, of all kingdoms of the world of which I have any knowledge, where the public weal is best observed, and least violence is exercised on the people, and where no buildings are overthrown or demolished in war, England is the best; and the ruin and misfortune falls on them who wage the war. . . . The kingdom of England has this advantage beyond other nations, that the people and the country are not destroyed or burnt, nor the buildings demolished; and ill-fortune falls on men of war, and especially on the nobles."

[2] See the ballads of *Chevy Chase*, *The Nut-Brown Maid*, etc. Many of them are admirable little dramas.

able to attain its end or issue. The Renaissance and the Reformation, those two national outbreaks, are still far off; and the literature of the period retains to the end, like the highest ranks of English society, almost the perfect stamp of its French origin and its foreign models.

CHAPTER III.

The New Tongue.

I.

AMID so many barren endeavours, throughout the long impotence of Norman literature, which was content to copy, and of Saxon literature, which bore no fruit, a definite language was nevertheless formed, and there was room for a great writer. Geoffrey Chaucer appeared, a man of mark, inventive though a disciple, original though a translator, who by his genius, education, and life, was enabled to know and to depict a whole world, but above all to satisfy the chivalric world and the splendid courts which shone upon the heights.[1] He belonged to it, though learned and versed in all branches of scholastic knowledge; and he took such a share in it, that his life from beginning to end was that of a man of the world, and a man of action. We find him by turns in King Edward's army, in the king's train, husband of a maid of honour to the queen, a pensioner, a placeholder, a member of Parliament, a knight, founder of a family which was hereafter to become allied to royalty. Moreover, he was in the king's council, brother-in-law of John of Gaunt, employed more than once in open embassies or secret missions at Florence, Genoa, Milan, Flanders, commissioner in France for the marriage

[1] Born between 1328 and 1345, died in 1400.

of the Prince of Wales, high up and low down on the political ladder, disgraced, restored to place. This experience of business, travel, war, and the court, was not like a book-education. He was at the court of Edward III., the most splendid in Europe, amidst tourneys, grand receptions, magnificent displays; he took part in the pomps of France and Milan; conversed with Petrarch, perhaps with Boccaccio and Froissart; was actor in, and spectator of, the finest and most tragical of dramas. In these few words, what ceremonies and cavalcades are implied! what processions in armour, what caparisoned horses, bedizened ladies! what display of gallant and lordly manners! what a varied and brilliant world, well suited to occupy the mind and eyes of a poet! Like Froissart, and better than he, Chaucer could depict the castles of the nobles, their conversations, their talk of love, and anything else that concerned them, and please them by his portraiture.

II.

Two notions raised the middle age above the chaos of barbarism: one religious, which had fashioned the gigantic cathedrals, and swept the masses from their native soil to hurl them upon the Holy Land; the other secular, which had built feudal fortresses, and set the man of courage erect and armed, within his own domain: the one had produced the adventurous hero, the other the mystical monk; the one, to wit, the belief in God, the other the belief in self. Both, running to excess, had degenerated by the violence of their own strength: the one had exalted independence into rebellion, the other had turned piety into enthusiasm: the first made man unfit for civil life, the second drew him back from

natural life: the one, sanctioning disorder, dissolved society; the other, enthroning infatuation, perverted intelligence. Chivalry had need to be repressed because it issued in brigandage; devotion restrained because it induced slavery. Turbulent feudalism grew feeble, like oppressive theocracy; and the two great master passions, deprived of their sap and lopped of their stem, gave place by their weakness to the monotony of habit and the taste for worldliness, which shot forth in their stead and flourished under their name.

Gradually, the serious element declined, in books as in manners, in works of art as in books. Architecture, instead of being the handmaid of faith, became the slave of phantasy. It was exaggerated, became too ornamental, sacrificing general effect to detail, shot up its steeples to unreasonable heights, decorated its churches with canopies, pinnacles, trefoiled gables, open-work galleries. "Its whole aim was continually to climb higher, to clothe the sacred edifice with a gaudy bedizenment, as if it were a bride on her wedding morning."[1] Before this marvellous lacework, what emotion could one feel but a pleased astonishment? What becomes of Christian sentiment before such scenic ornamentations? In like manner literature sets itself to play. In the eighteenth century, the second age of absolute monarchy, we saw on one side finials and floriated cupolas, on the other pretty *vers de société*, courtly and sprightly tales, taking the place of severe beauty-lines and noble writings. Even so in the fourteenth century, the second age of feudalism, they had on one side the stone fretwork and slender efflorescence of aerial forms, and on the other finical verses and

[1] Renan, *De l'Art au Moyen Age.*

diverting stories, taking the place of the old grand architecture and the old simple literature. It is no longer the overflowing of a true sentiment which produces them, but the craving for excitement. Consider Chaucer, his subjects, and how he selects them. He goes far and wide to discover them, to Italy, France, to the popular legends, the ancient classics. His readers need diversity, and his business is to "provide fine tales:" it was in those days the poet's business.[1] The lords at table have finished dinner, the minstrels come and sing, the brightness of the torches falls on the velvet and ermine, on the fantastic figures, the motley, the elaborate embroidery of their long garments; then the poet arrives, presents his manuscript, "richly illuminated, bound in crimson violet, embellished with silver clasps and bosses, roses of gold:" they ask him what his subject is, and he answers "Love."

III.

In fact, it is the most agreeable subject, fittest to make the evening hours pass sweetly, amid the goblets filled with spiced wine and the burning perfumes. Chaucer translated first that great storehouse of gallantry, the *Roman de la Rose*. There is no pleasanter entertainment. It is about a rose which the lover wished to pluck: the pictures of the May months, the groves, the flowery earth, the green hedgerows, abound and display their bloom. Then come portraits of the smiling ladies, Richesse, Fraunchise, Gaiety, and by way of contrast, the sad characters, Daunger and

[1] See Froissart, his life with the Count of Foix and with King Richard II.

Travail, all fully and minutely described, with detail of features, clothing, attitude; they walk about, as on a piece of tapestry, amid landscapes, dances, castles, among allegorical groups, in lively sparkling colours, displayed, contrasted, ever renewed and varied so as to entertain the sight. For an evil has arisen, unknown to serious ages — *ennui:* novelty and brilliancy followed by novelty and brilliancy are necessary to withstand it; and Chaucer, like Boccaccio and Froissart, enters into the struggle with all his heart. He borrows from Boccaccio his history of Palamon and Arcite, from Lollius his history of Troilus and Cressida, and re-arranges them. How the two young Theban knights, Arcite and Palamon, both fall in love with the beautiful Emily, and how Arcite, victorious in tourney, falls and dies, bequeathing Emily to his rival; how the fine Trojan knight Troilus wins the favour of Cressida, and how Cressida abandons him for Diomedes—these are still tales in verse, tales of love. A little tedious they may be; all the writings of this age; French, or imitated from French, are born of too prodigal minds; but how they glide along! A winding stream, which flows smoothly on level sand, and sparkles now and again in the sun, is the only image we can compare it to. The characters speak too much, but then they speak so well! Even when they dispute, we like to listen, their anger and offences are so wholly based on a happy overflow of unbroken converse. Remember Froissart, how slaughters, assassinations, plagues, the butcheries of the Jacquerie, the whole chaos of human misery, disappears in his fine ceaseless humour, so that the furious and grinning figures seem but ornaments and choice embroideries to relieve the skein of shaded

and coloured silk which forms the groundwork of his narrative! but, in particular, a multitude of descriptions spread their gilding over all. Chaucer leads you among arms, palaces, temples, and halts before each beautiful thing. Here:

"The statue of Venus glorious for to see
Was naked fleting in the large see,
And fro the navel doun all covered was
With wawes grene, and bright as any glas.
A citole in hire right hand hadde she,
And on hire hed, ful semely for to see,
A rose gerlond fressh, and wel smelling,
Above hire hed hire doves fleckering."[1]

Further on, the temple of Mars:

"First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storme shuld bresten every bough:
And dounward from an hill under a bent.
Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,
Wrought all of burned stele, of which th' entree
Was longe and streite, and gastly for to see.
And therout came a rage and swiche a vise,
That it made all the gates for to rise.
The northern light in at the dore shone,
For window on the wall ne was ther none,
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerne.
The dore was all of athamant eterne,
Yclenched overthwart and endelong
With yren tough, and for to make it strong,

[1] *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, *l.* 1957–1964.

Every piler the temple to sustene
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene."[1]

Everywhere on the wall were representations of slaughter; and in the sanctuary

"The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and loked grim as he were wood, . . .
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete."[2]

Are not these contrasts well designed to rouse the imagination? You will meet in Chaucer a succession of similar pictures. Observe the train of combatants who came to joust in the tilting field for Arcite and Palamon:

"With him ther wenten knightes many on.
Som wol ben armed in an habergeon
And in a brestplate, and in a gipon;
And som wol have a pair of plates large;
And som wol have a Pruce sheld, or a targe,
Som wol ben armed on his legges wele,
And have an axe, and som a mace of stele. . . .
Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face.
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.

[1] *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 59, *l.* 1977–1996.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 61, *l.* 2043–2050.

Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate ful of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound,
Colered with gold, and torettes filed round.
An hundred lordes had he in his route,
Armed ful wel, with hertes sterne and stoute.
With Arcita, in stories as men find,
The gret Emetrius the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin . . .
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five and twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was well begonnen for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thondering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond fresshe and lusty for to sene.

Upon his hond he bare for his deduit
An egle tame, as any lily whit.,
An hundred lordes had he with him there,
All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,
Ful richely in alle manere thinges . . .
About this king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart."[1]

A herald would not describe them better nor more fully. The lords and ladies of the time would recognise here their tourneys and masquerades.

There is something more pleasant than a fine narrative, and that is a collection of fine narratives, especially when the narratives are all of different colourings. Froissart gives us such under the name of *Chronicles;* Boccaccio still better; after him the lords of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles;* and, later still, Marguerite of Navarre. What more natural among people who meet, talk, and wish to amuse themselves. The manners of the time suggest them; for the habits and tastes of society had begun, and fiction thus conceived only brings into books the conversations which are heard in the hall and by the wayside. Chaucer describes a troop of pilgrims, people of every rank, who are going to Canterbury; a knight, a sergeant of law, an Oxford clerk, a doctor, a miller, a prioress, a monk, who agree to tell a story all round:

"For trewely comfort ne mirthe is non,
To riden by the way domb as the ston."

They tell their stories accordingly; and on this slender and flexible thread all the jewels of feudal imagination, real or false, contribute one after another their motley shapes to form a necklace; side by side with noble

[1] *Knight's Tale*, ii. p. 63, *l.* 2120–2188.

and chivalrous stories: we have the miracle of an infant whose throat was cut by Jews, the trials of patient Griselda, Canace and marvellous fictions of Oriental fancy, obscene stories of marriage and monks, allegorical or moral tales, the fable of the cock and hen, a list of great unfortunate persons: Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Nebuchadnezzar, Zenobia, Crœsus, Ugolino, Peter of Spain. I leave out some, for I must be brief. Chaucer is like a jeweller with his hands full: pearls and glass beads, sparkling diamonds and common agates, black jet and ruby roses, all that history and imagination had been able to gather and fashion during three centuries in the East, in France, in Wales, in Provence, in Italy, all that had rolled his way, clashed together, broken or polished by the stream of centuries, and by the great jumble of human memory, he holds in his hand, arranges it, composes therefrom a long sparkling ornament, with twenty pendants, a thousand facets, which by its splendour, variety, contrasts, may attract and satisfy the eyes of those most greedy for amusement and novelty.

He does more. The universal outburst of unchecked curiosity demands a more refined enjoyment: reverie and fantasy alone can satisfy it; not profound and thoughtful fantasy as we find it in Shakspeare, nor impassioned and meditative reverie as we find it in Dante, but the reverie and fantasy of the eyes, ears, external senses, which in poetry as in architecture call for singularity, wonders, accepted challenges, victories gained over the rational and probable, and which are satisfied only by what is crowded and dazzling. When we look at a cathedral of that time, we feel a sort of fear. Substance is wanting; the walls are hollowed

out to make room for windows, the elaborate work of the porches, the wonderful growth of the slender columns, the thin curvature of arches—everything seems to menace us; support has been withdrawn to give way to ornament. Without external prop or buttress, and artificial aid of iron clamp-work, the building would have crumbled to pieces on the first day; as it is, it undoes itself; we have to maintain on the spot a colony of masons continually to ward off the continual decay. But our sight grows dim in following the wavings and twistings of the endless fretwork; the dazzling rose-window of the portal and the painted glass throw a chequered light on the carved stalls of the choir, the gold-work of the altar, the long array of damascened and glittering copes, the crowd of statues, tier above tier; and amid this violet light, this quivering purple, amid these arrows of gold which pierce the gloom, the entire building is like the tail of a mystical peacock. So most of the poems of the time are barren of foundation; at most a trite morality serves them for mainstay: in short, the poet thought of nothing else than displaying before us a glow of colours and a jumble of forms. They are dreams or visions; there are five or six in Chaucer, and you will meet more on your advance to the Renaissance. But the show is splendid. Chaucer is transported in a dream to a temple of glass,[1] on the walls of which are figured in gold all the legends of Ovid and Virgil, an infinite train of characters and dresses, like that which, on the painted glass in the churches, occupied then the gaze of the faithful. Suddenly a golden eagle, which soars near the sun, and glitters like a carbuncle descends with the swiftness of

[1] The House of Fame.

lightning, and carries him off in his talons above the stars, dropping him at last before the House of Fame, splendidly built of beryl, with shining windows and lofty turrets, and situated on a high rock of almost inaccessible ice. All the southern side was graven with the names of famous men, but the sun was continuously melting them. On the northern side, the names, better protected, still remained. On the turrets appeared the minstrels and "gestiours," with Orpheus, Arion, and the great harpers, and behind them myriads of musicians, with horns, flutes, bag-pipes, and reeds, on which they played, and which filled the air; then all the charmers, magicians, and prophets. He enters, and in a high hall, plated with gold, embossed with pearls, on a throne of carbuncle, he sees a woman seated, a "noble quene," amidst an infinite number of heralds, whose embroidered cloaks bore the arms of the most famous knights in the world, and heard the sounds of instruments, and the celestial melody of Calliope and her sisters. From her throne to the gate was a row of pillars, on which stood the great historians and poets; Josephus on a pillar of lead and iron; Statius on a pillar of iron stained with tiger's blood; Ovid, "Venus' clerk," on a pillar of copper; then, on one higher than the rest, Homer and Livy, Dares the Phrygian, Guido Colonna, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the other historians of the war of Troy. Must I go on copying this phantasmagoria, in which confused erudition mars picturesque invention, and frequent banter shows sign that the vision is only a planned amusement? The poet and his reader have imagined for half-an-hour decorated halls and bustling crowds; a slender thread of common sense has ingeniously crept along the

transparent golden mist which they amuse themselves with following. That suffices; they are pleased with their fleeting fancies, and ask no more.

Amid this exuberancy of mind, amid these refined cravings, and this insatiate exaltation of imagination and the senses, there was one passion, that of love, which, combining all, was developed in excess, and displayed in miniature the sickly charm, the fundamental and fatal exaggeration, which are the characteristics of the age, and which, later, the Spanish civilisation exhibits both in its flower and its decay. Long ago, the courts of love in Provence had established the theory. "Each one who loves," they said, "grows pale at the sight of her whom he loves; each action of the lover ends in the thought of her whom he loves. Love can refuse nothing to love."[1] This search after excessive sensation had ended in the ecstasies and transports of Guido Cavalcanti, and of Dante; and in Languedoc a company of enthusiasts had established themselves, love-penitents, who, in order to prove the violence of their passion, dressed in summer in furs and heavy garments, and in winter in light gauze, and walked thus about the country, so that several of them fell ill and died. Chaucer, in their wake, explained in his verses the craft of love,[2] the ten commandments, the twenty statutes of love; and praised his lady, his "daieseye," his "Margarite," his "vermeil rose;" depicted love in ballads, visions, allegories, didactic poems, in a hundred guises. This is chivalrous, lofty love, as it was conceived in the middle age; above all, tender love. Troilus loves

[1] André le Chapelain, 1170.

[2] Also the *Court of Love*, and perhaps *The Assemble of Ladies* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*.

Cressida like a troubadour; without Pandarus, her uncle, he would have languished, and ended by dying in silence. He will not reveal the name of her he loves. Pandarus has to tear it from him, perform all the bold actions himself, plan every kind of stratagem. Troilus, however brave and strong in battle, can but weep before Cressida, ask her pardon, and faint. Cressida, on her side, has every delicate feeling. When Pandarus brings her Troilus' first letter, she begins by refusing it, and is ashamed to open it: she opens it only because she is told the poor knight is about to die. At the first words "all rosy hewed tho woxe she;" and though the letter is respectful, she will not answer it. She yields at last to the importunities of her uncle, and answers Troilus that she will feel for him the affection of a sister. As to Troilus, he trembles all over, grows pale when he sees the messenger return, doubts his happiness, and will not believe the assurance which is given him:

> "But right so as these holtes and these hayis
> That han in winter dead ben and dry,
> Revesten hem in grene, whan that May is. . . .
> Right in that selfe wise, sooth for to sey,
> Woxe suddainly his herte full of joy."[1]

Slowly, after many troubles, and thanks to the efforts of Pandarus, he obtains her confession; and in this confession what a delightful charm!

> "And as the newe abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first, whan she beginneth sing,
> Whan that she heareth any heerdes tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stearing,
> And after siker doeth her voice outring:

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 12.

Right so Creseide, whan that her drede stent,
Opened her herte and told him her entent." [1]

He, as soon as he perceived a hope from afar,

" In chaunged voice, right for his very drede,
Which voice eke quoke, and thereto his manere,
Goodly abasht, and now his hewes rede,
Now pale, unto Cresseide his ladie dere,
With looke doun cast, and humble iyolden chere,
Lo, the alderfirst word that him astart
Was twice: ' Mercy, mercy, O my sweet herte!' " [2]

This ardent love breaks out in impassioned accents, in bursts of happiness. Far from being regarded as a fault, it is the source of all virtue. Troilus becomes braver, more generous, more upright, through it; his speech runs now on love and virtue; he scorns all villany; he honours those who possess merit, succours those who are in distress; and Cressida, delighted, repeats all day, with exceeding liveliness, this song, which is like the warbling of a nightingale:

" Whom should I thanken but you, god of love,
Of all this blisse, in which to bathe I ginne?
And thanked be ye, lorde for that I love,
This is the right life that I am inne,
To flemen all maner vice and sinne:
This doeth me so to vertue for to entende
That daie by daie I in my will amende.
And who that saieth that for to love is vice, . . .
He either is envious, or right nice,
Or is unmightie for his shreudnesse
To loven. . . .
But I with all mine herte and all my might,
As I have saied, woll love unto my last,

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 3, p. 40. [2] *Ibid.* p. 4.

My owne dere herte, and all mine owne knight,
In whiche mine herte growen is so fast,
And his in me, that it shall ever last." [1]

But misfortune comes. Her father Calchas demands her back, and the Trojans decide that they will give her up in exchange for prisoners. At this news she swoons, and Troilus is about to slay himself. Their love at this time seems imperishable; it sports with death, because it constitutes the whole of life. Beyond that better and delicious life which it created, it seems there can be no other:

"But as God would, of swough she abraide,
And gan to sighe, and Troilus she cride,
And he answerde: 'Lady mine, Creseide,
Live ye yet?' and let his swerde doun glide:
'Ye herte mine, that thanked be Cupide,'
(Quod she), and therewithal she sore sight,
And he began to glade her as he might.

Took her in armes two and kist her oft,
And her to glad, he did al his entent,
For which her gost, that flikered aie a loft,
Into her wofull herte ayen it went:
But at the last, as that her eye glent
Aside, anon she gan his sworde aspie,
As it lay bare, and gan for feare crie.

And asked him why had he it out draw,
And Troilus anon the cause her told,
And how himself therwith he wold have slain,
For which Creseide upon him gan behold,
And gan him in her armes faste fold,
And said: 'O mercy God, lo which a dede!
Alas, how nigh we weren bothe dede!'" [2]

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. iv. bk. 2, p. 292.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. v. bk. 4, p. 97.

At last they are separated, with what vows and what tears! and Troilus, alone in his chamber, murmurs:

"'Where is mine owne lady lefe and dere?
Where is her white brest, where is it, where?
Where been her armes, and her eyen clere
That yesterday this time with me were?' . . .
Nor there nas houre in al the day or night,
Whan he was ther as no man might him here,
That he ne sayd: 'O lovesome lady bright,
How have ye faren sins that ye were there?
Welcome ywis mine owne lady dere!' . . .
Fro thence-forth he rideth up and doune,
And every thing came him to remembraunce,
As he rode forth by the places of the toune,
In which he whilom had all his pleasaunce:
'Lo, yonder saw I mine owne lady daunce,
And in that temple with her eien clere,
Me caught first my right lady dere.
And yonder have I herde full lustely
My dere herte laugh, and yonder play
Saw her ones eke ful blisfully,
And yonder ones to me gan she say,
'Now, good sweete, love me well I pray.
And yonde so goodly gan she me behold,
That to the death mine herte is to her hold.
And at the corner in the yonder house
Herde I mine alderlevest lady dere,
So womanly, with voice melodiouse,
Singen so wel, so goodly, and so clere,
That in my soule yet me thinketh I here
The blissful sowne, and in that yonder place,
My lady first me toke unto her grace.'"[1]

None has since found more true and tender words.

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. bk. 5, p. 119 *et passim*.

These are the charming "poetic branches" which flourished amid gross ignorance and pompous parades. Human intelligence in the middle age had blossomed on that side where it perceived the light.

But mere narrative does not suffice to express his felicity and fancy; the poet must go where "shoures sweet of rain descended soft."

> "And every plaine was clothed faire
> With new greene, and maketh small floures
> To springen here and there in field and in mede,
> So very good and wholsome be the shoures,
> That it renueth that was old and dede,
> In winter time; and out of every sede
> Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight
> Of this season wexeth glad and light. . . .
> In which (grove) were okes great, streight as a line,
> Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew
> Was newly sprong, and an eight foot or nine
> Every tree well fro his fellow grew."

He must forget himself in the vague felicity of the country, and, like Dante, lose himself in ideal light and allegory. The dreams of love, to continue true, must not take too visible a form, nor enter into a too consecutive history; they must float in a misty distance; the soul in which they hover can no longer think of the laws of existence; it inhabits another world; it forgets itself in the ravishing emotion which troubles it, and sees its well-loved visions rise, mingle, come and go, as in summer we see the bees on a hill-slope flutter in a haze of light, and circle round and round the flowers.

One morning,[1] a lady sings, at the dawn of day, I entered an oak-grove

[1] *The Flower and the Leaf*, vi. p. 244, *l.* 6–32.

"With branches brode, laden with leves new,
That sprongen out ayen the sunne-shene,
Some very red, and some a glad light grene. . . .[1]

And I, that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no hert, I deme, in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood, and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie,
As full of blossomes as it might be;
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough; and, as him list, he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet. . . .

And as I sat, the birds harkening thus,
Methought that I heard voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That ever any wight, I trow truly,
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the voice to angels most was like."[2]

Then she sees arrive "a world of ladies . . . in surcotes white of velvet . . . set with emerauds . . . as of great pearles round and orient, and diamonds fine and rubies red." And all had on their head "a rich fret of gold . . . full of stately riche stones set," with "a chapelet of branches fresh and grene . . . some of

[1] *The Flower and the Leaf*, p. 245, *l.* 33.
[2] *Ibid.* vi. p. 246, *l.* 78–133.

laurer, some of woodbind, some of agnus castus;" and at the same time came a train of valiant knights in splendid array, with "harneis" of red gold, shining in the sun, and noble steeds, with trappings "of cloth of gold, and furred with ermine." These knights and ladies were the servants of the Leaf, and they sate under a great oak, at the feet of their queen.

From the other side came a bevy of ladies as resplendent as the first, but crowned with fresh flowers. These were the servants of the Flower. They alighted, and began to dance in the meadow. But heavy clouds appeared in the sky, and a storm broke out. They wished to shelter themselves under the oak, but there was no more room; they ensconced themselves as they could in the hedges and among the brushwood; the rain came down and spoiled their garlands, stained their robes, and washed away their ornaments; when the sun returned, they went to ask succour from the queen of the Leaf; she, being merciful, consoled them, repaired the injury of the rain, and restored their original beauty. Then all disappears as in a dream.

The lady was astonished, when suddenly a fair dame appeared and instructed her. She learned that the servants of the Leaf had lived like brave knights, and those of the Flower had loved idleness and pleasure. She promises to serve the Leaf, and came away.

Is this an allegory? There is at least a lack of wit. There is no ingenious enigma; it is dominated by fancy, and the poet thinks only of displaying in quiet verse the fleeting and brilliant train which had amused his mind, and charmed his eyes.

Chaucer himself, on the first of May, rises and goes out into the meadows. Love enters his heart with the

balmy air; the landscape is transfigured, and the birds begin to speak:

There sate I downe among the faire flours,
And saw the birds trip out of hir bours,
There as they rested hem all the night,
They were so joyfull of the dayes light,
They began of May for to done honours.

They coud that service all by rote,
There was many a lovely note,
Some song loud as they had plained,
And some in other manner voice yfained
And some all out with the ful throte.

The proyned hem and made hem right gay,
And daunceden, and lepten on the spray,
And evermore two and two in fere,
Right so as they had chosen hem to yere,
In Feverere upon saint Valentines day.

And the river that I saté upon,
It made such a noise as it ron,
Accordaunt with the birdes armony,
Methought it was the best melody
That might ben yheard of any mon."[1]

This confused harmony of vague noises troubles the sense; a secret languor enters the soul. The cuckoo throws his monotonous voice like a mournful and tender sigh between the white ash-tree boles; the nightingale makes his triumphant notes roll and ring above the leafy canopy; fancy breaks in unsought, and Chaucer hears them dispute of Love. They sing alternately an antistrophic song, and the nightingale weeps for vexation to hear the cuckoo speak in depreciation of Love. He

[1] *The Cuckow and Nightingale*, vi. p. 121, *l.* 67–85.

is consoled, however, by the poet's voice, seeing that he also suffers with him:

"'For love and it hath doe me much wo.'
'Ye use' (quod she) 'this medicine
Every day this May or thou dine
Go looke upon the fresh daisie,
And though thou be for wo in point to die,
That shall full greatly lessen thee of thy pine.

'And looke alway that thou be good and trew,
And I wol sing one of the songes new,
For love of thee, as loud as I may crie:'
And than she began this song full hie,
'I shrewe all hem that been of love untrue.'"[1]

To such exquisite delicacies love, as with Petrarch, had carried poetry; by refinement even, as with Petrarch, it is lost now and then in its wit, conceits, clinches. But a marked characteristic at once separates it from Petrarch. If over-excited, it is also graceful, polished, full of archness, banter, fine sensual gaiety, somewhat gossipy, as the French always paint love. Chaucer follows his true masters, and is himself an elegant speaker, facile, ever ready to smile, loving choice pleasures, a disciple of the *Roman de la Rose*, and much less Italian than French.[2] The bent of French character makes of love not a passion, but a gay banquet, tastefully arranged, in which the service is elegant, the food exquisite, the silver brilliant, the two guests in full dress, in good humour, quick to anticipate and please each other, knowing how to keep up the gaiety, and when to part. In Chaucer, without doubt, this other

[1] *The Cuckow and Nightingale*, vi. p. 126, *l.* 230–241.
[2] Stendhal, *On Love*: the difference of Love-taste and Love-passion.

altogether worldly vein runs side by side with the sentimental element. If Troilus is a weeping lover, Pandarus is a lively rascal, who volunteers for a singular service with amusing urgency, frank immorality, and carries it out carefully, gratuitously, thoroughly. In these pretty attempts Chaucer accompanies him as far as possible, and is not shocked. On the contrary, he makes fun out of it. At the critical moment, with transparent hypocrisy, he shelters himself behind his "author." If you find the particulars free, he says, it is not my fault; "so writen clerks in hir bokes old," and "I mote, aftir min auctour, telle . . ." Not only is he gay, but he jests throughout the whole tale. He sees clearly through the tricks of feminine modesty; he laughs at it archly, knowing full well what is behind; he seems to be saying, finger on lip: "Hush! let the grand words roll on, you will be edified presently." We are, in fact, edified; so is he, and in the nick of time he goes away, carrying the light: "For ought I can aspies, this light nor I ne serven here of nought." "Troilus," says uncle Pandarus, "if ye be wise, sweveneth not now, lest more folke arise." Troilus takes care not to swoon; and Cressida at last, being alone with him, speaks wittily and with prudent delicacy; there is here an exceeding charm, no coarseness. Their happiness covers all, even voluptuousness, with a profusion and perfume of its heavenly roses. At most a slight spice of archness flavours it: "and gode thrift he had full oft." Troilus holds his mistress in his arms: "with worse hap God let us never mete." The poet is almost as well pleased as they: for him, as for the men of his time, the sovereign good is love, not damped, but satisfied; they ended even by thinking such love a

merit. The ladies declared in their judgments, that when people love, they can refuse nothing to the beloved. Love has become law; it is inscribed in a code; they combine it with religion; and there is a sacrament of love, in which the birds in their anthems sing matins.[1] Chaucer curses with all his heart the covetous wretches, the business men, who treat it as a madness:

> "As would God, tho wretches that despise
> Service of love had eares al so long
> As had Mida, ful of covetise, . . .
> To teachen hem, that they been in the vice
> And lovers not, although they hold hem nice,
> . . . God yeve hem mischaunce,
> And every lover in his trouth avaunce."[2]

He clearly lacks severity, so rare in southern literature. The Italians in the middle age made a virtue of joy; and you perceive that the world of chivalry, as conceived by the French, expanded morality so as to confound it with pleasure.

IV.

There are other characteristics still more gay. The true Gallic literature crops up; obscene tales, practical jokes on one's neighbour, not shrouded in the Ciceronian style of Boccaccio, but related lightly by a man in good humour;[3] above all, active roguery, the trick of laughing at your neighbour's expense. Chaucer displays it better than Rutebeuf, and sometimes better than La Fontaine. He does not knock his men down; he pricks them as

[1] *The Court of Love*, about 1353, *et seq.* See also the *Testament of Love.*

[2] *Troilus and Cressida*, vol. v. iii. pp. 44, 45.

[3] The story of the pear-tree (Merchant's Tale), and of the cradle (Reeve's Tale), for instance, in the *Canterbury Tales.*

he passes, not from deep hatred or indignation, but through sheer nimbleness of disposition, and quick sense of the ridiculous; he throws his gibes at them by handfuls. His man of law is more a man of business than of the world:

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was."[1]

His three burgesses:

"Everich, for the wisdom that he can
Was shapelich for to ben an alderman.
For catel hadden they ynough and rent,
And eke hir wives wolde it wel assent."[2]

Of the mendicant Friar he says:

"His wallet lay beforne him in his lappe,
Bret-ful of pardon come from Rome al hote."[3]

The mockery here comes from the heart, in the French manner, without effort, calculation, or vehemence. It is so pleasant and so natural to banter one's neighbour! Sometimes the lively vein becomes so copious, that it furnishes an entire comedy, indelicate certainly, but so free and life-like! Here is the portrait of the Wife of Bath, who has buried five husbands;

"Bold was hire face, and fayre and rede of hew,
She was a worthy woman all hire live;
Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five,
Withouten other compagnie in youthe. . . .
In all the parish wif ne was ther non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee."[4]

[1] *Canterbury Tales, prologue*, p. 10, *l.* 323. [2] *Ibid.* p. 12, *l.* 373.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 21, *l.* 688. [4] *Ibid.* ii. *prologue*, p. 14, *l.* 460.

What a tongue she has! Impertinent, full of vanity, bold, chattering, unbridled, she silences everybody, and holds forth for an hour before coming to her tale. We hear her grating, high-pitched, loud, clear voice, wherewith she deafened her husbands. She continually harps upon the same ideas, repeats her reasons, piles them up and confounds them, like a stubborn mule who runs along shaking and ringing his bells, so that the stunned listeners remain open-mouthed, wondering that a single tongue can spin out so many words. The subject was worth the trouble. She proves that she did well to marry five husbands, and she proves it clearly, like a woman who knew it, because she had tried it:

"God bad us for to wex and multiplie;
That gentil text can I wel understond;
Eke wel I wot, he sayd, that min husbond
Shuld leve fader and moder, and take to me;
But of no noumbre mention made he,
Of bigamie or of octogamie;
Why shuld men than speke of it vilanie?
Lo here the wise king dan Solomon,
I trow he hadde wives mo than on,
(As wolde God it leful were to me
To be refreshed half so oft as he,)
Which a gift of God had he for alle his wives? . . .
Blessed be God that I have wedded five.
Welcome the sixthe whan that ever he shall. . . .
He (Christ) spake to hem that wold live parfitly,
And lordings (by your leve), that am nat I;
I wol bestow the flour of all myn age
In th' actes and the fruit of mariage. . . .
An husbond wol I have, I wol not lette,
Which shal be both my dettour and my thrall,

And have his tribulation withall
Upon his flesh, while that I am his wif."[1]

Here Chaucer has the freedom of Molière, and we possess it no longer. His good wife justifies marriage in terms just as technical as Sganarelle. It behoves us to turn the pages quickly, and follow in the lump only this Odyssey of marriages. The experienced wife, who has journeyed through life with five husbands, knows the art of taming them, and relates how she persecuted them with jealousy, suspicion, grumbling, quarrels, blows given and received; how the husband, checkmated by the continuity of the tempest, stooped at last, accepted the halter, and turned the domestic mill like a conjugal and resigned ass:

"For as an hors, I coude bite and whine;
I coude plain, and I was in the gilt. . . .
I plained first, so was our werre ystint.
They were ful glad to excusen hem ful blive
Of thing, the which they never agilt hir live. . . .
I swore that all my walking out by night
Was for to espien wenches that he dight. . . .
For though the pope had sitten hem beside,
I wold not spare hem at hir owen bord. . . .
But certainly I made folk swiche chere,
That in his owen grese I made him frie
For anger, and for veray jalousie.
By God, in erth I was his purgatorie,
For which I hope his soule be in glorie."[2]

She saw the fifth first at the burial of the fourth:

"And Jankin oure clerk was on of tho:
As helpe me God, whan that I saw him go

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 168, *l.* 5610–5739
[2] *Ibid.* ii. p. 179, *l.* 5968–6072.

Aftir the bere, me thought he had a paire
Of legges and of feet, so clene and faire,
That all my herte I yave unto his hold.
He was, I trow, a twenty winter old,
And I was fourty, if I shal say soth. . . .
As helpe me God, I was a lusty on,
And faire, and riche, and yonge, and well begon."[1]

"Yonge," what a word! Was human delusion ever more happily painted? How life-like is all, and how easy the tone. It is the satire of marriage. You will find it twenty times in Chaucer. Nothing more is wanted to exhaust the two subjects of French mockery, than to unite with the satire of marriage the satire of religion.

We find it here; and Rabelais is not more bitter. The monk whom Chaucer paints is a hypocrite, a jolly fellow, who knows good inns and jovial hosts better than the poor and the hospitals:

"A Frere there was, a wanton and a mery . . .
Ful wel beloved, and familier was he
With frankeleins over all in his contree,
And eke with worthy wimmen of the toun. . . .
Full swetely herde he confession,
And pleasant was his absolution.
He was an esy man to give penance,
Ther as he wiste to han a good pitance:
For unto a poure ordre for to give
Is signe that a man is wel yshrive. . . .
And knew wel the tavernes in every toun,
And every hosteler and gay tapstere,
Better than a lazar and a beggere. . . .
It is not honest, it may not avance,
As for to delen with no swich pouraille,
But all with riche and sellers of vitaille. . . .

[1] *Canterbury Tales, Wife of Bath's Prologue*, p. 185, *l.* 6177-6188.

For many a man so hard is of his herte,
He may not wepe, although him sore smerte.
Therfore in stede of weping and praieres,
Men mote give silver to the poure freres."[1]

This lively irony had an exponent before in Jean de Meung. But Chaucer pushes it further, and gives it life and motion. His monk begs from house to house, holding out his wallet:

"In every hous he gan to pore and prie,
And begged mele and chese, or elles corn. . . .
'Yeve us a bushel whete, or malt, or reye,
A Goddes kichel, or a trippe of chese,
Or elles what you list, we may not chese;
A Goddes halfpeny, or a masse peny;
Or yeve us of your braun, if ye have any,
A dagon of your blanket, leve dame,
Our suster dere (lo here I write your name).' . . .
And whan that he was out at dore, anon,
He planed away the names everich on."[2]

He has kept for the end of his circuit, Thomas, one of his most liberal clients. He finds him in bed, and ill; here is excellent fruit to suck and squeeze:

"'God wot,' quod he, 'laboured have I ful sore,
And specially for thy salvation,
Have I sayd many a precious orison. . . .
I have this day ben at your chirche at messe . . .
And ther I saw our dame, a, wher is she?'"[3]

The dame enters:

"This frere ariseth up ful curtisly,
And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,
And kisseth hire swete and chirketh as a sparwe."[4] . . .

[1] *Canterbury Tales, prologue*, ii. p. 7, *l.* 208 *et passim.*
[2] *Ibid. The Sompnoures Tale*, ii. p. 220, *l.* 7319–7340.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 221, *l.* 7366. [4] *Ibid.* p. 221, *l.* 7384.

Then, in his sweetest and most caressing voice, he compliments her, and says:

> "'Thanked be God that you yaf soule and lif,
> Yet saw I not this day so faire a wif
> In all the chirche, God so save me.'"[1]

Have, we not here already Tartuffe and Elmire? But the monk is with a farmer, and can go to work more quickly and directly. When the compliments ended, he thinks of the substance, and asks the lady to let him talk alone with Thomas. He must inquire after the state of his soul:

> "'I wol with Thomas speke a litel throw:
> Thise curates ben so negligent and slow
> To gropen tendrely a conscience. . . .
> Now, dame,' quod he, '*jeo vous die sanz doute*,
> Have I nat of a capon but the liver,
> And of your white bred nat but a shiver,
> And after that a rosted pigges hed
> (But I ne wolde for me no beest were ded),
> Than had I with you homly suffisance.
> I am a man of litel sustenance,
> My spirit hath his fostring in the Bible.
> My body is ay so redy and penible
> To waken, that my stomak is destroied.'"[2]

Poor man, he raises his hands to heaven, and ends with a sigh.

The wife tells him her child died a fortnight before. Straightway he manufactures a miracle; could he earn his money in any better way? He had a revelation of this death in the "dortour" of the convent; he saw the

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 222, *l.* 7389.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 222, *l.* 7397–7429.

[illegible] carried to paradise; he rose with his brothers, "with many a tere trilling on our cheke," and they sang a Te Deum:

"'For, sire and dame, trusteth me right wel,
Our orisons ben more effectuel,
And more we seen of Cristes secree thinges
Than borel folk, although that they be kinges.
We live in poverte, and in abstinence,
And borel folk in richesse and dispence. . .
Lazer and Dives liveden diversely,
And divers guerdon hadden they therby.'"[1]

Presently he spurts out a whole sermon, in a loathsome style, and with an interest which is plain enough. The sick man, wearied, replies that he has already given half his fortune to all kinds of monks, and yet he continually suffers. Listen to the grieved exclamation, the true indignation of the mendicant monk, who sees himself threatened by the competition of a brother of the cloth to share his client, his revenue, his booty, his food-supplies:

"The frere answered: 'O Thomas, dost thou so?
What nedeth you diverse freres to seche?
What nedeth him that hath a parfit leche,
To sechen other leches in the toun?
Your inconstance is your confusion.
Hold ye than me, or elles our covent,
To pray for you ben insufficient?
Thomas, that jape n' is not worth a mite,
Your maladie is for we han to lite.'"[2]

Recognise the great orator; he employs even the grand style to keep the supplies from being cut off:

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 223, *l.* 7450–7460.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 226, *l.* 7536–7544.

" 'A, yeve that covent half a quarter otes;
And yeve that covent four and twenty grotes;
And yeve that frere a peny, and let him go:
Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thing be so.
What is a ferthing worth parted on twelve
Lo, eche thing that is oned in himself
Is more strong, than whan it is yscatered . . .
Thou woldest han our labour al for nought.'"[1]

Then he begins again his sermon in a louder tone, shouting at each word, quoting examples from Seneca and the classics, a terrible fluency, a trick of his trade, which, diligently applied, must draw money from the patient. He asks for gold, "to make our cloistre,"

". . . 'And yet, God wot, uneth the fundament
Parfourmed is, ne of our pavement
N' is not a tile yet within our wones;
By God, we owen fourty pound for stones.
Now help Thomas, for him that harwed helle,
For elles mote we oure bokes selle,
And if ye lacke oure predication,
Than goth this world all to destruction.
For who so fro this world wold us bereve.
So God me save, Thomas, by your leve,
He wold bereve out of this world the sonne.'"[2]

In the end, Thomas in a rage promises him a gift, tells him to put his hand in the bed and take it, and sends him away duped, mocked, and covered with filth.

We have descended now to popular farce: when amusement must be had at any price, it is sought, as here, in broad jokes, even in filthiness. We can see how these two coarse and vigorous plants have blossomed in

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Tale*, p. 226, *l.* 7545-7558.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 230, *l.* 7685-7695.

the dung of the middle age. Planted by the sly fellows of Champagne and Ile-de-France, watered by the *trouvères*, they were destined fully to expand, speckled and ruddy, in the large hands of Rabelais. Meanwhile Chaucer plucks his nosegay from it. Deceived husbands, mishaps in inns, accidents in bed, cuffs, kicks, and robberies, these suffice to raise a loud laugh. Side by side with noble pictures of chivalry, he gives us a train of Flemish grotesque figures, carpenters, joiners, friars, summoners; blows abound, fists descend on fleshy backs; many nudities are shown; they swindle one another out of their corn, their wives; they pitch one another out of a window; they brawl and quarrel. A bruise, a piece of open filthiness, passes in such society for a sign of wit. The summoner, being rallied by the friar, gives him tit for tat:

"'This Frere bosteth that he knoweth helle,
And, God it wot, that is but litel wonder,
Freres and fendes ben but litel asonder.
For parde, ye han often time herd telle
How that a Frere ravished was to helle
In spirit ones by a visioun,
And as an angel lad him up and doun,
To shewen him the peines that ther were, . . .
And unto Sathanas he lad him doun.
(And now hath Sathanas,' saith he, 'a tayl
Broder than of a Carrike is the sayl.)
Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas, quod he,
. . . . . and let the Frere see
Wher is the nest of Freres in this place.
And er than half a furlong way of space,
Right so as bees out swarmen of an hive,
Out of the devils . . . ther gonnen to drive.
A twenty thousand Freres on a route,

And thurghout hell they swarmed al aboute,
And com agen, as fast as they may gon.' "[1]

Such were the coarse buffooneries of the popular imagination.

V.

It is high time to return to Chaucer himself. Beyond the two notable characteristics which settle his place in his age and school of poetry, there are others which take him out of his age and school. If he was romantic and gay like the rest, it was after a fashion of his own. He observes characters, notes their differences, studies the coherence of their parts, endeavours to describe living individualities,—a thing unheard of in his time, but which the renovators in the sixteenth century, and first among them Shakspeare, will do afterwards. Is it already the English positive common sense and aptitude for seeing the inside of things which begins to appear? A new spirit, almost manly, pierces through, in literature as in painting, with Chaucer as with Van Eyck, with both at the same time; no longer the childish imitation of chivalrous life[2] or monastic devotion, but the grave spirit of inquiry and craving for deep truths, whereby art becomes complete. For the first time, in Chaucer as in Van Eyck, the character described stands out in relief; its parts are connected; it is no longer an unsubstantial phantom. You may guess its past and foretell its future action. Its externals manifest the personal and incommunicable details of its inner nature, and the

[1] *Canterbury Tales*, ii. *The Sompnoures Prologue*, p. 217, *l.* 7254-7279.

[2] See in *The Canterbury Tales* the Rhyme of Sir Topas, a parody on the chivalric histories. Each character there seems a precursor of Cervantes.

infinite complexity of its economy and motion. To this day, after four centuries, that character is individualised, and typical; it remains distinct in our memory, like the creations of Shakspeare and Rubens. We observe this growth in the very act. Not only does Chaucer, like Boccaccio, bind his tales into a single history; but in addition—and this is wanting in Boccaccio—he begins with the portrait of all his narrators, knight, summoner, man of law, monk, bailiff or reeve, host, about thirty distinct figures, of every sex, condition, age, each painted with his disposition, face, costume, turns of speech, little significant actions, habits, antecedents, each maintained in his character by his talk and subsequent actions, so that we can discern here, sooner than in any other nation, the germ of the domestic novel as we write it to-day. Think of the portraits of the franklin, the miller, the mendicant friar, and wife of Bath. There are plenty of others which show the broad brutalities, the coarse tricks, and the pleasantries of vulgar life, as well as the gross and plentiful feastings of sensual life. Here and there honest old swashbucklers, who double their fists, and tuck up their sleeves; or contented beadles, who, when they have drunk, will speak nothing but Latin. But by the side of these there are some choice characters; the knight, who went on a crusade to Granada and Prussia, brave and courteous:

> "And though that he was worthy he was wise,
> And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
> He never yet no vilanie ne sayde
> In alle his lif, unto no manere wight,
> He was a veray parfit gentil knight."[1]

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 3, *l.* 68–72.

"With him, ther was his sone, a yonge Squier.
A lover, and a lusty bacheler,
With lockes crull as they were laide in presse.
Of twenty yere of age he was I gesse.
Of his stature he was of even lengthe,
And wonderly deliver, and grete of strengthe.
And he hadde be somtime in chevachie,
In Flaundres, in Artois, and in Picardie,
And borne him wel, as of so litel space,
In hope to stonden in his ladies grace.
Embrouded was he, as it were a mede
Alle ful of fresshe floures, white and rede.
Singing he was, or floyting alle the day,
He was as fresshe, as is the moneth of May.
Short was his goune, with sleves long and wide.
Wel coude he sitte on hors, and fayre ride.
He coude songes make, and wel endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write.
So hote he loved, that by nightertale
He slep no more than doth the nightingale.
Curteis he was, lowly and servisable,
And carf befor his fader at the table."[1]

There is also a poor and learned clerk of Oxford; and finer still, and more worthy of a modern hand, the Prioress, "Madame Eglantine," who as a nun, a maiden, a great lady, is ceremonious, and shows signs of exquisite taste. Would a better be found now-a-days in a German chapter, amid the most modest and lively bevy of sentimental and literary canonesses?

"Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy
Hire gretest othe n'as but by Seint Eloy;
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 3, *l.* 79–100.

Ful wel she sange the service devine,
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly
After the scole of Stratford-atte-bowe,
For Frenche of Paris, was to hire unknowe.
At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.
Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
Thatte no drope ne fell upon hire brest.
In curtesie was sette ful moche hire lest.
Hire over lippe wiped she so clene,
That in hire cuppe was no ferthing sene
Of grese, whan she dronken hadde hire draught,
Ful semely after hire mete she raught.
And sikerly she was of grete disport
And ful plesant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence."[1]

Are you offended by these provincial affectations? Not at all; it is delightful to behold these nice and pretty ways, these little affectations, the waggery and prudery, the half-worldly, half-monastic smile. We inhale a delicate feminine perfume, preserved and grown old under the stomacher:

"But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede.
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 4. *l.* 118–141.

Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte."[1]

Many elderly ladies throw themselves into such affections as these, for lack of others. Elderly! what an objectionable word have I employed! She was not elderly:

"Ful semely hire wimple ypinched was,
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale, and therto soft and red;
But sikerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode I trowe;
For hardily she was not undergrowe.
Ful fetise was hire cloke, as I was ware.
Of small corall aboute hire arm she bare
A pair of bedes, gauded al with grene;
And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene,
On whiche was first ywritten a crouned A,
And after, *Amor vincit omnia*."[2]

A pretty ambiguous device, suitable either for gallantry or devotion; the lady was both of the world and the cloister: of the world, you may see it in her dress; of the cloister, you gather it from "another Nonne also with hire hadde she, that was hire chapelleine, and Preestes thre;" from the Ave Maria which she sings, the long edifying stories which she relates. She is like a fresh, sweet, and ruddy cherry, made to ripen in the sun, but which, preserved in an ecclesiastical jar, has become candied and insipid in the syrup.

Such is the power of reflection which begins to dawn, such the high art. Chaucer studies here, rather than aims at amusement; he ceases to gossip, and thinks; instead

[1] Prologue to *Canterbury Tales*, ii. p. 5, *l.* 142-150.
[2] *Ibid. l.* 151-162.

of surrendering himself to the facility of flowing improvisation, he plans. Each tale is suited to the teller: the young squire relates a fantastic and Oriental history; the tipsy miller a loose and comical story; the honest clerk the touching legend of Griselda. All these tales are bound together, and that much better than by Boccaccio, by little veritable incidents, which spring from the characters of the personages, and such as we light upon in our travels. The horsemen ride on in good humour in the sunshine, in the open country; they converse. The miller has drunk too much ale, and will speak, "and for no man forbere." The cook goes to sleep on his beast, and they play practical jokes on him. The monk and the summoner get up a dispute about their respective lines of business. The host restores peace, makes them speak or be silent, like a man who has long presided in the inn parlour, and who has often had to check brawlers. They pass judgment on the stories they listen to: declaring that there are few Griseldas in the world; laughing at the misadventures of the tricked carpenter; drawing a lesson from the moral tale. The poem is no longer, as in the contemporary literature, a mere procession, but a painting in which the contrasts are arranged, the attitudes chosen, the general effect calculated, so that it becomes life and motion; we forget ourselves at the sight, as in the case of every life-like work; and we long to get on horseback on a fine sunny morning, and canter along green meadows with the pilgrims to the shrine of the good saint of Canterbury.

Weigh the value of the words "general effect." According as we plan it or not, we enter on our maturity or infancy? The whole future lies in these

two words. Savages or half savages, warriors of the Heptarchy or knights of the middle-age; up to this period, no one had reached to this point. They had strong emotions, tender at times, and each expressed them according to the original gift of his race, some by short cries, others by continuous babble. But they did not command or guide their impressions; they sang or conversed by impulse, at random, according to the bent of their disposition, leaving their ideas to present themselves as they might, and when they hit upon order, it was ignorantly and involuntarily. Here for the first time appears a superiority of intellect, which at the instant of conception suddenly halts, rises above itself, passes judgment, and says to itself, "This phrase tells the same thing as the last—remove it; these two ideas are disjointed—connect them; this description is feeble—reconsider it." When a man can speak thus he has an idea, not learned in the schools, but personal, and practical, of the human mind, its process and needs, and of things also, their composition and combinations; he has a style, that is, he is capable of making everything understood and seen by the human mind. He can extract from every object, landscape, situation, character, the special and significant marks, so as to group and arrange them, in order to compose an artificial work which surpasses the natural work in its purity and completeness. He is capable, as Chaucer was, of seeking out in the old common forest of the middle-ages, stories and legends, to replant them in his own soil, and make them send out new shoots. He has the right and the power, as Chaucer had, of copying and translating, because by dint of retouching he impresses on his translations and copies his original mark; he

re-creates what he imitates, because through or by the side of worn-out fancies and monotonous stories, he can display, as Chaucer did, the charming ideas of an amiable and elastic mind, the thirty master-forms of the fourteenth century, the splendid freshness of the verdurous landscape and spring-time of England. He is not far from conceiving an idea of truth and life. He is on the brink of independent thought and fertile discovery. This was Chaucer's position. At the distance of a century and a half, he has affinity with the poets of Elizabeth[1] by his gallery of pictures, and with the reformers of the sixteenth century by his portrait of the good parson.

Affinity merely. He advanced a few steps beyond the threshold of his art, but he paused at the end of the vestibule. He half opens the great door of the temple, but does not take his seat there; at most, he sat down in it only at intervals. In *Arcite and Palamon*, in *Troilus and Cressida*, he sketches sentiments, but does not create characters; he easily and naturally traces the winding course of events and conversations, but does not mark the precise outline of a striking figure. If occasionally, as in the description of the temple of Mars, after the *Thebaid* of Statius, feeling at his back the glowing breeze of poetry, he draws out his feet, clogged with the mud of the middle-age, and at a bound stands upon the poetic plain on which Statius imitated Virgil and equalled Lucan, he, at other times, again falls back into the childish gossip of the trouvères, or the dull gabble of

[1] Tennyson, in his *Dream of Fair Women*, sings:

"Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
Preluded those melodious bursts, that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still."—TR.

learned clerks—to "Dan Phebus or Apollo-Delphicus." Elsewhere, a commonplace remark on art intrudes in the midst of an impassioned description. He uses three thousand verses to conduct Troilus to his first interview. He is like a precocious and poetical child, who mingles in his love-dreams quotations from his grammar and recollections of his alphabet.[1] Even in the *Canterbury Tales* he repeats himself, unfolds artless developments, forgets to concentrate his passion or his idea. He begins a jest, and scarcely ends it. He dilutes a bright colouring in a monotonous stanza. His voice is like that of a boy breaking into manhood. At first a manly and firm accent is maintained, then a shrill sweet sound shows that his growth is not finished, and that his strength is subject to weakness. Chaucer sets out as if to quit the middle-age; but in the end he is there still. To-day he composes the *Canterbury Tales;* yesterday he was translating the *Roman de la Rose.* To-day he is studying the complicated machinery of the heart, discovering the issues of primitive education or of the ruling disposition, and creating the comedy of manners; to-morrow, he will have no pleasure but in curious events, smooth allegories, amorous discussions, imitated from the French, or learned moralities from the ancients. Alternately he is an observer and a trouvère; instead of the step he ought to have advanced, he has but made a half-step.

Who has prevented him, and the others who sur-

[1] Speaking of Cressida, iv., book i. p. 236, he says:

"Right as our first letter is now an a,
In beautie first so stood she makeles,
Her goodly looking gladed all the prees,
Nas never seene thing to be praised so derre,
Nor under cloude blacke so bright a sterre."

round him? We meet with the obstacle in the tales he has translated of *Melibeus*, of the *Parson*, in his *Testament of Love;* in short, so long as he writes verse, he is at his ease; as soon as he takes to prose, a sort of chain winds around his feet and stops him. His imagination is free, and his reasoning a slave. The rigid scholastic divisions, the mechanical manner of arguing and replying, the ergo, the Latin quotations, the authority of Aristotle and the Fathers, come and weigh down his budding thought. His native invention disappears under the discipline imposed. The servitude is so heavy, that even in the work of one of his contemporaries, the *Testament of Love*, which, for a long time, was believed to be written by Chaucer, amid the most touching plaints and the most smarting pains, the beautiful ideal lady, the heavenly mediator who appears in a vision, Love, sets her theses, establishes that the cause of a cause is the cause of the thing caused, and reasons as pedantically as they would at Oxford. In what can talent, even feeling, end, when it is kept down by such shackles? What succession of original truths and new doctrines could be found and proved, when in a moral tale, like that of Melibeus and his wife Prudence, it was thought necessary to establish a formal controversy, to quote Seneca and Job, to forbid tears, to bring forward the weeping Christ to authorise tears, to enumerate every proof, to call in Solomon, Cassiodorus, and Cato; in short, to write a book for schools? The public cares only for pleasant and lively thoughts; not serious and general ideas; these latter are for a special class only. As soon as Chaucer gets into a reflective mood, straightway Saint Thomas, Peter Lombard, the manual of sins, the treatise on definition and syllogism, the

army of the ancients and of the Fathers, descend from their glory, enter his brain, speak in his stead; and the trouvère's pleasant voice becomes the dogmatic and sleep-inspiring voice of a doctor. In love and satire he has experience, and he invents; in what regards morality and philosophy he has learning, and copies. For an instant, by a solitary leap, he entered upon the close observation and the genuine study of man; he could not keep his ground, he did not take his seat, he took a poetic excursion; and no one followed him. The level of the century is lower; he is on it himself for the most part. He is in the company of narrators like Froissart, of elegant speakers like Charles of Orléans, of gossipy and barren verse-writers like Gower, Lydgate, and Occleve. There is no fruit, but frail and fleeting blossom, many useless branches, still more dying or dead branches; such is this literature. And why? Because it had no longer a root; after three centuries of effort, a heavy instrument cut it underground. This instrument was the Scholastic Philosophy.

VI.

Beneath every literature there is a philosophy. Beneath every work of art is an idea of nature and of life; this idea leads the poet. Whether the author knows it or not, he writes in order to exhibit it; and the characters which he fashions, like the events which he arranges, only serve to bring to light the dim creative conception which raises and combines them. Underlying Homer appears the noble life of heroic paganism and of happy Greece. Underlying Dante, the sad and violent life of fanatical Catholicism and of the much-hating Italians. From either we might draw a theory

of man and of the beautiful. It is so with others; and this is how, according to the variations, the birth, blossom, decline, or sluggishness of the master-idea, literature varies, is born, flourishes, degenerates, comes to an end. Whoever plants the one, plants the other: whoever undermines the one, undermines the other. Place in all the minds of any age a new grand idea of nature and life, so that they feel and produce it with their whole heart and strength, and you will see them, seized with the craving to express it, invent forms of art and groups of figures. Take away from these minds every grand new idea of nature and life, and you will see them, deprived of the craving to express all-important thoughts, copy, sink into silence, or rave.

What has become of these all-important thoughts? What labour worked them out? What studies nourished them? The labourers did not lack zeal. In the twelfth century the energy of their minds was admirable. At Oxford there were thirty thousand scholars. No building in Paris could contain the crowd of Abelard's disciples; when he retired to solitude, they accompanied him in such a multitude, that the desert became a town. No difficulty repulsed them. There is a story of a young boy, who, though beaten by his master, was wholly bent on remaining with him, that he might still learn. When the terrible encyclopedia of Aristotle was introduced, though disfigured and unintelligible, it was devoured. The only question presented to them, that of universals, so abstract and dry, so embarrassed by Arabic obscurities and Greek subtilties, during centuries, was seized upon eagerly. Heavy and awkward as was the instrument supplied to them, I mean syllogism, they made themselves masters of it, rendered it

still more heavy, plunged it into every object and in every direction. They constructed monstrous books, in great numbers, cathedrals of syllogism, of unheard of architecture, of prodigious finish, heightened in effect by intensity of intellectual power, which the whole sum of human labour has only twice been able to match.[1] These young and valiant minds thought they had found the temple of truth; they rushed at it headlong, in legions, breaking in the doors, clambering over the walls, leaping into the interior, and so found themselves at the bottom of a moat. Three centuries of labour at the bottom of this black moat added not one idea to the human mind.

For consider the questions which they treat of. They seem to be marching, but are merely marking time. People would say, to see them moil and toil, that they will educe from heart and brain some great original creed, and yet all belief was imposed upon them from the outset. The system was made; they could only arrange and comment upon it. The conception comes not from them, but from Constantinople. Infinitely complicated and subtle as it is, the supreme work of Oriental mysticism and Greek metaphysics, so disproportioned to their young understanding, they exhaust themselves to reproduce it, and moreover burden their unpractised hands with the weight of a logical instrument which Aristotle created for theory and not for practice, and which ought to have remained in a

[1] Under Proclus and under Hegel. Duns Scotus, at the age of thirty-one, died, leaving beside his sermons and commentaries, twelve folio volumes, in a small close handwriting, in a style like Hegel's, on the same subject as Proclus treats of. Similarly with Saint Thomas and the whole train of schoolmen. No idea can be formed of such a labour before handling the books themselves.

cabinet of philosophical curiosities, without being ever carried into the field of action. "Whether the divine essence engendered the Son, or was engendered by the Father; why the three persons together are not greater than one alone; attributes determine persons, not substance, that is, nature; how properties can exist in the nature of God, and not determine it; if created spirits are local and can be circumscribed; if God can know more things than He is aware of;"[1]—these are the ideas which they moot: what truth could issue thence? From hand to hand the chimera grows, and spreads wider its gloomy wings. "Can God cause that, the place and body being retained, the body shall have no position, that is, existence in place?—Whether the impossibility of being engendered is a constituent property of the First Person of the Trinity—Whether identity, similitude, and equality are real relations in God."[2] Duns Scotus distinguishes three kinds of matter: matter which is firstly first, secondly first, thirdly first. According to him, we must clear this triple hedge of thorny abstractions in order to understand the production of a sphere of brass. Under such a regimen, imbecility soon makes its appearance. Saint Thomas himself considers, "whether the body of Christ arose with its wounds,—whether this body moves with the motion of the host and the chalice in consecration,—whether at the first instant of conception Christ had the use of free judgment,—whether Christ was slain by Himself or by another?" Do you think you are at the limits of human folly? Listen. He considers "whether the dove in which the Holy Spirit appeared

[1] Peter Lombard, *Book of Sentences*. It was the classic of the middle-age.

[2] Duns Scotus, ed. 1639.

was a real animal,—whether a glorified body can occupy one and the same place at the same time as another glorified body,—whether in the state of innocence all children were masculine?" I pass over others as to the digestion of Christ, and some still more untranslatable.[1] This is the point reached by the most esteemed doctor, the most judicious mind, the Bossuet of the middle-age. Even in this ring of inanities the answers are laid down. Roscellinus and Abelard were excommunicated, exiled, imprisoned, because they swerved from it. There is a complete minute dogma which closes all issues; there is no means of escaping; after a hundred wriggles and a hundred efforts, you must come and tumble into a formula. If by mysticism you try to fly over their heads, if by experience you endeavour to creep beneath, powerful talons await you at your exit. The wise man passes for a magician, the enlightened man for a heretic. The Waldenses, the Catharists, the disciples of John of Parma, were burned; Roger Bacon died only just in time, otherwise he might have been burned. Under this constraint men ceased to think; for he who speaks of thought, speaks of an effort at invention, an individual creation, an energetic action. They recite a lesson, or sing a catechism; even in paradise, even in ecstasy and the divinest raptures of love, Dante thinks himself bound to show an exact memory and a scholastic orthodoxy. How then with

[1] Utrum angelus diligat se ipsum dilectione naturali vel electiva? Utrum in statu innocentiæ fuerit generatio per coitum? Utrum omnes fuissent nati in sexu masculino? Utrum cognitio angeli posset dici matutina et vespertina? Utrum martyribus aureola debeatur? Utrum virgo Maria fuerit virgo in concipiendo? Utrum remanserit virgo post partum? The reader may look out in the text the reply to these last two questions. (S. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. 1677.)

the rest? Some, like Raymond Lully, set about inventing an instrument of reasoning to serve in place of the understanding. About the fourteenth century, under the blows of Occam, this verbal science began to totter; they saw that its entities were only words; it was discredited. In 1367, at Oxford, of thirty thousand students, there remained six thousand;[1] they still set their "Barbara and Felapton," but only in the way of routine. Each one in turn mechanically traversed the petty region of threadbare cavils, scratched himself in the briars of quibbles, and burdened himself with his bundle of texts; nothing more. The vast body of science which was to have formed and vivified the whole thought of man, was reduced to a text-book.

So, little by little, the conception which fertilised and ruled all others, dried up; the deep spring, whence flowed all poetic streams, was found empty; science furnished nothing more to the world. What further works could the world produce? As Spain, later on, renewing the middle-age, after having shone splendidly and foolishly by her chivalry and devotion, by Lope de Vega and Calderon, Loyola and St. Theresa, became enervated through the Inquisition and through casuistry, and ended by sinking into a brutish silence; so the middle-age, outstripping Spain, after displaying the senseless heroism of the crusades, and the poetical ecstasy of the cloister, after producing chivalry and saintship, Francis of Assisi, St. Louis, and Dante, languished under the Inquisition and the scholastic learning, and became extinguished in idle raving and inanity.

[1] The Rev. Henry Anstey, in his Introduction to *Munimenta Academica*, Lond. 1868, says that "the statement of Richard of Armagh that there were in the thirteenth century 30,000 scholars at Oxford is almost incredible." P. xlviii.—TR.

Must we quote all these good people who speak without having anything to say? You may find them in Warton;[1] dozens of translators, importing the poverties of French literature, and imitating imitations; rhyming chroniclers, most commonplace of men, whom we only read because we must accept history from every quarter, even from imbeciles; spinners and spinsters of didactic poems, who pile up verses on the training of falcons, on heraldry, on chemistry; editors of moralities, who invent the same dream over again for the hundredth time, and get themselves taught universal history by the goddess Sapience. Like the writers of the Latin decadence, these folk only think of copying, compiling, abridging, constructing in text-books, in rhymed memoranda, the encyclopedia of their times.

Listen to the most illustrious, the grave Gower—"morall Gower," as he was called?[2] Doubtless here and there he contains a remnant of brilliancy and grace. He is like an old secretary of a Court of Love, André le Chapelain or any other, who would pass the day in solemnly registering the sentences of ladies, and in the evening, partly asleep on his desk, would see in a half-dream their sweet smile and their beautiful eyes.[3] The ingenious but exhausted vein of Charles of Orléans still flows in his French ballads. He has the same fondling delicacy, almost a little affected. The poor little poetic spring flows yet in thin transparent streamlets over the smooth pebbles, and murmurs with a babble, pretty, but so low that at times you cannot hear it. But dull is the rest! His great poem, *Con-*

[1] *Hist. of English Poetry*, vol. ii.

[2] Contemporary with Chaucer. The *Confessio Amantis* dates from 1393.

[3] *History of Rosiphele. Ballads.*

fessio Amantis, is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, imitated chiefly from Jean de Meung, having for object, like the *Roman de la Rose*, to explain and classify the impediments of love. The superannuated theme is always reappearing, covered by a crude erudition. You will find here an exposition of hermetic science, lectures on the philosophy of Aristotle, a treatise on politics, a litany of ancient and modern legends gleaned from the compilers, marred in the passage by the pedantry of the schools and the ignorance of the age. It is a cartload of scholastic rubbish; the sewer tumbles upon this feeble spirit, which of itself was flowing clearly, but now, obstructed by tiles, bricks, plaster, ruins from all quarters of the globe, drags on darkened and sluggish. Gower, one of the most learned of his time,[1] supposed that Latin was invented by the old prophetess Carmentis; that the grammarians, Aristarchus, Donatus, and Didymus, regulated its syntax, pronunciation, and prosody; that it was adorned by Cicero with the flowers of eloquence and rhetoric; then enriched by translations from the Arabic, Chaldæan, and Greek; and that at last, after much labour of celebrated writers, it attained its final perfection in Ovid, the poet of love. Elsewhere he discovers that Ulysses learned rhetoric from Cicero, magic from Zoroaster, astronomy from Ptolemy, and philosophy from Plato. And what a style! so long, so dull,[2] so drawn out by repetitions, the most minute details, garnished with references to his text, like a man who, with his eyes glued to his Aristotle and his Ovid,

[1] Warton, ii. 240.

[2] See, for instance, his description of the sun's crown, the most poetical passage in book vii.

a slave of his musty parchments, can do nothing but copy and string his rhymes together. Schoolboys even in old age, they seem to believe that every truth, all wit, is in their great wood-bound books; that they have no need to find out and invent for themselves; that their whole business is to repeat; that this is, in fact, man's business. The scholastic system had enthroned the dead letter, and peopled the world with dead understandings.

After Gower come Occleve and Lydgate.[1] "My father Chaucer would willingly have taught me," says Occleve, "but I was dull, and learned little or nothing." He paraphrased in verse a treatise of Egidius, on government; these are moralities. There are others, on compassion, after Augustine, and on the art of dying; then love-tales; a letter from Cupid, dated from his court in the month of May. Love and moralities,[2] that is, abstractions and affectation, were the taste of the time; and so, in the time of Lebrun, of Esménard, at the close of contemporaneous French literature,[3] they produced collections of didactic poems, and odes to Chloris. As for the monk Lydgate, he had some talent, some imagination, especially in high-toned descriptions: it was the last flicker of a dying literature; gold received a golden coating, precious stones were placed upon diamonds, ornaments multiplied and made fantastic; as in their dress and buildings, so in their style.[4] Look at the costumes of Henry IV. and Henry V., monstrous heart-shaped or horn-shaped head-dresses, long sleeves covered

[1] 1420, 1430.

[2] This is the title Froissart (1397) gave to his collection when presenting it to Richard II. [3] Lebrun, 1729-1807; Esménard, 1770-1812.

[4] Lydgate, *The Destruction of Troy*—description of Hector's chapel. Especially read the *Pageants* or *Solemn Entries*.

with ridiculous designs, the plumes, and again the oratories, armorial tombs, little gaudy chapels, like conspicuous flowers under the naves of the Gothic perpendicular. When we can no more speak to the soul, we try to speak to the eyes. This is what Lydgate does, nothing more. Pageants or shows are required of him, "disguisings" for the Company of goldsmiths; a mask before the king, a May-entertainment for the sheriffs of London, a drama of the creation for the festival of Corpus Christi, a masquerade, a Christmas show; he gives the plan and furnishes the verses. In this matter he never runs dry; two hundred and fifty-one poems are attributed to him. Poetry thus conceived becomes a manufacture; it is composed by the yard. Such was the judgment of the Abbot of St. Albans, who, having got him to translate a legend in verse, pays a hundred shillings for the whole, verse, writing, and illuminations, placing the three works on a level. In fact, no more thought was required for the one than for the others. His three great works, *The Fall of Princes*, *The Destruction of Troy*, and *The Siege of Thebes*, are only translations or paraphrases, verbose, erudite, descriptive, a kind of chivalrous processions, coloured for the twentieth time, in the same manner, on the same vellum. The only point which rises above the average, at least in the first poem, is the idea of Fortune,[1] and the violent vicissitudes of human life. If there was a philosophy at this time, this was it. They willingly narrated horrible and tragic histories; gather them from antiquity down to their own day; they were far from the trusting and passionate piety which felt the hand of God in the government of

[1] See the Vision of Fortune, a gigantic figure. In this painting he shows both feeling and talent.

the world; they saw that the world went blundering here and there like a drunken man. A sad and gloomy world, amused by eternal pleasures, oppressed with a dull misery, which suffered and feared without consolation or hope, isolated between the ancient spirit in which it had no living hope, and the modern spirit whose active science it ignored. Fortune, like a black smoke, hovers over all, and shuts out the sight of heaven. They picture it as follows:—

> "Her face semyng cruel and terrible
> And by disdaynè menacing of loke, . . .
> An hundred handes she had, of eche part . .
> Some of her handès lyft up men alofte,
> To hye estate of worldlye dignitè;
> Another handè griped ful unsofte,
> Which cast another in grete adversite."[1]

They look upon the great unhappy ones, a captive king, a dethroned queen, assassinated princes, noble cities destroyed,[2] lamentable spectacles as exhibited in Germany and France, and of which there will be plenty in England; and they can only regard them with a harsh resignation. Lydgate ends by reciting a commonplace of mechanical piety, by way of consolation. The reader makes the sign of the cross, yawns, and goes away. In fact, poetry and religion are no longer capable of suggesting a genuine sentiment. Authors copy, and copy again. Hawes[3] copies the *House of Fame* of Chaucer, and a sort of allegorical amorous poem, after the *Roman de la Rose*. Barclay[4] translates the *Mirror of Good*

[1] Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*. Warton, ii. 280.

[2] The War of the Hussites, The Hundred Years' War, and The War of the Roses.

[3] About 1506. *The Temple of Glass*. *Passetyme of Pleasure*.

[4] About 1500.

Manners and the *Ship of Fools*. Continually we meet with dull abstractions, used up and barren; it is the scholastic phase of poetry. If anywhere there is an accent of greater originality, it is in this *Ship of Fools*, and in Lydgate's *Dance of Death*, bitter buffooneries, sad gaieties, which, in the hands of artists and poets, were having their run throughout Europe. They mock at each other, grotesquely and gloomily; poor, dull, and vulgar figures, shut up in a ship, or made to dance on their tomb to the sound of a fiddle, played by a grinning skeleton. At the end of all this mouldy talk, and amid the disgust which they have conceived for each other, a clown, a tavern Triboulet,[1] composer of little jeering and macaronic verses, Skelton[2] makes his appearance, a virulent pamphleteer, who, jumbling together French, English, Latin phrases, with slang, and fashionable words, invented words, intermingled with short rhymes, fabricates a sort of literary mud, with which he bespatters Wolsey and the bishops. Style, metre, rhyme, language, art of every kind, is at an end; beneath the vain parade of official style there is only a heap of rubbish. Yet, as he says,

> "Though my rhyme be ragged,
> Tattered and gagged,
> Rudely rain-beaten,
> Rusty, moth-eaten,
> Yf ye take welle therewithe,
> It hath in it some pithe."

It is full of political animus, sensual liveliness, English

[1] The court fool in Victor Hugo's drama of *Le Roi s'amuse*.—TR.

[2] Died 1529; Poet-Laureate 1489. His *Bouge of Court*, his *Crown of Laurel*, his *Elegy on the Death of the Earl of Northumberland*, are well written, and belong to official poetry.

and popular instincts; it lives. It is a coarse life, still elementary, swarming with ignoble vermin, like that which appears in a great decomposing body. It is life, nevertheless, with its two great features which it is destined to display: the hatred of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which is the Reformation; the return to the senses and to natural life, which is the Renaissance.

BOOK II.

THE RENAISSANCE.

CHAPTER I.

The Pagan Renaissance.

§ 1. Manners of the Time.

I.

For seventeen centuries a deep and sad thought had weighed upon the spirit of man, first to overwhelm it, then to exalt and to weaken it, never loosing its hold throughout this long space of time. It was the idea of the weakness and decay of the human race. Greek corruption, Roman oppression, and the dissolution of the ancient world, had given rise to it; it, in its turn, had produced a stoical resignation, an epicurean indifference, Alexandrian mysticism, and the Christian hope in the kingdom of God. "The world is evil and lost, let us escape by insensibility, amazement, ecstasy." Thus spoke the philosophers; and religion, coming after, announced that the end was near: "Prepare, for the kingdom of God is at hand." For a thousand years universal ruin incessantly drove still deeper into their hearts this gloomy thought; and when man in the

feudal state raised himself, by sheer force of courage and muscles, from the depths of final imbecility and general misery, he discovered his thought and his work fettered by the crushing idea, which, forbidding a life of nature and worldly hopes, erected into ideals the obedience of the monk and the dreams of fanatics.

It grew ever worse and worse. For the natural result of such a conception, as of the miseries which engender it, and the discouragement which it gives rise to, is to do away with personal action, and to replace originality by submission. From the fourth century, gradually the dead letter was substituted for the living faith. Christians resigned themselves into the hands of the clergy, they into the hands of the Pope. Christian opinions were subordinated to theologians, and theologians to the Fathers. Christian faith was reduced to the accomplishment of works, and works to the accomplishment of ceremonies. Religion, fluid during the first centuries, was now congealed into a hard crystal, and the coarse contact of the barbarians had deposited upon its surface a layer of idolatry: theocracy and the Inquisition, the monopoly of the clergy and the prohibition of the Scriptures, the worship of relics and the sale of indulgences began to appear. In place of Christianity, the church; in place of a free creed, enforced orthodoxy; in place of moral fervour, fixed religious practices; in place of the heart and stirring thought, outward and mechanical discipline: such are the characteristics of the middle ages. Under this constraint thinking society had ceased to think; philosophy was turned into a text-book, and poetry into dotage; and mankind, slothful and crouching, delivering up their conscience and their conduct into the hands of their priests, seemed but as puppets,

fit only for reciting a catechism and mumbling over beads.[1]

At last invention makes another start; and it makes it by the efforts of the lay society, which rejected theocracy, kept the State free, and which presently discovered, or re-discovered, one after another, the industries, sciences, and arts. All was renewed; America and the Indies were added to the map of the world; the shape of the earth was ascertained, the system of the universe propounded, modern philology was inaugurated, the experimental sciences set on foot, art and literature shot forth like a harvest, religion was transformed: there was no province of human intelligence and action which was not refreshed and fertilised by this universal effort. It was so great, that it passed from the innovators to the laggards, and reformed Catholicism in the face of Protestantism which it formed. It seems as though men had suddenly opened their eyes and seen. In fact, they attain a new and superior kind of intelligence. It is the proper feature of this age, that men no longer make themselves masters of objects by bits, or isolated, or through scholastic or mechanical classifications, but as a whole, in general and complete views, with the eager grasp of a sympathetic spirit, which being placed before a vast object, penetrates it in all its parts, tries it in all its relations, appropriates and assimilates it, impresses upon itself its living and potent image, so life-like and so powerful, that it is fain to translate it into externals through a work of art or an action. An extraordinary warmth of soul, a superabundant and

[1] See, at Bruges, the pictures of Hemling (fifteenth century). No paintings enable us to understand so well the ecclesiastical piety of the middle-age, which was altogether like that of the Buddhists.

splendid imagination, reveries, visions, artists, believers, founders, creators,—that is what such a form of intellect produces; for to create we must have, as had Luther and Loyola, Michel Angelo and Shakspeare, an idea, not abstract, partial, and dry, but well defined, finished, sensible,—a true creation, which acts inwardly, and struggles to appear to the light. This was Europe's grand age, and the most notable epoch of human growth. To this day we live from its sap, we only carry on its pressure and efforts.

II.

When human power is manifested so clearly and in such great works, it is no wonder if the ideal changes, and the old pagan idea reappears. It recurs, bringing with it the worship of beauty and vigour, first in Italy; for this, of all countries in Europe, is the most pagan, and the nearest to the ancient civilisation; thence in France and Spain, and Flanders,[1] and even in Germany; and finally in England. How is it propagated? What revolution of manners reunited mankind at this time, everywhere, under a sentiment which they had forgotten for fifteen hundred years? Merely that their condition had improved, and they felt it. The idea ever expresses the actual situation, and the creatures of the imagination, like the conceptions of the mind, only manifest the state of society and the degree of its welfare; there is a fixed connection between what man admires and what he is. While misery overwhelms him, while the decadence is visible, and hope shut out, he is inclined to curse his life on earth, and seek consolation in another sphere.

[1] Van Orley, Michel Coxcie, Franz Floris, the de Vos', the Sadelers, Crispin de Pass, and the artists of Nuremberg.

As soon as his sufferings are alleviated, his power made manifest, his prospects brightened, he begins once more to love the present life, to be self-confident, to love and praise energy, genius, all the effective faculties which labour to procure him happiness. About the twentieth year of Elizabeth's reign, the nobles gave up shield and two-handed sword for the rapier;[1] a little, almost imperceptible fact, yet vast, for it is like the change which sixty years ago, made us give up the sword at court, to leave us with our arms swinging about in our black coats. In fact, it was the close of feudal life, and the beginning of court-life, just as to-day court-life is at an end, and the democratic reign has begun. With the two-handed swords, heavy coats of mail, feudal keeps, private warfare, permanent disorder, all the scourges of the middle-age retired, and faded into the past. The English had done with the Wars of the Roses. They no longer ran the risk of being pillaged to-morrow for being rich, and hung the next day for being traitors; they have no further need to furbish up their armour, make alliances with powerful nations, lay in stores for the winter, gather together men-at-arms, scour the country to plunder and hang others.[2] The monarchy, in England as throughout Europe, establishes peace in the community,[3] and with peace appear the useful arts. Domestic comfort follows civil security; and man, better furnished in his home, better protected in his hamlet,

[1] The first carriage was in 1564. It caused much astonishment. Some said that it was "a great sea-shell brought from China;" others, "that it was a temple in which cannibals worshipped the devil."

[2] For a picture of this state of things, see Fenn's *Paston Letters*.

[3] Louis XI. in France, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Henry VII. in England. In Italy the feudal regime ended earlier, by the establishment of republics and principalities.

takes pleasure in his life on earth, which he has changed, and means to change.

Toward the close of the fifteenth century[1] the impetus was given; commerce and the woollen trade made a sudden advance, and such an enormous one that cornfields were changed into pasture-lands, "whereby the inhabitants of the said town (Manchester) have gotten and come into riches and wealthy livings,"[2] so that in 1553, 40,000 pieces of cloth were exported in English ships. It was already the England which we see to-day, a land of green meadows, intersected by hedgerows, crowded with cattle, and abounding in ships—a manufacturing opulent land, with a people of beef-eating toilers, who enrich it while they enrich themselves. They improved agriculture to such an extent, that in half-a-century the produce of an acre was doubled.[3] They grew so rich, that at the beginning of the reign of Charles I. the Commons represented three times the wealth of the Upper House. The ruin of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma[4] sent to England "the third part of the merchants and manufacturers, who made silk, damask, stockings, taffetas, and serges." The defeat of the Armada and the decadence of Spain opened the seas to English merchants.[5] The toiling hive, who would dare, attempt, explore, act in unison, and always with profit, was

[1] 1488, Act of Parliament on Enclosures.

[2] A *Compendious Examination*, 1581, by William Strafford. Act of Parliament, 1541.

[3] Between 1377 and 1588 the increase was from two and a half to five millions.

[4] In 1585; Ludovic Guicciardini.

[5] Henry VIII. at the beginning of his reign had but one ship of war. Elizabeth sent out one hundred and fifty against the Armada. In 1553 was founded a company to trade with Russia. In 1578 Drake circumnavigated the globe. In 1600 the East India Company was founded.

about to reap its advantages and set out on its voyages, buzzing over the universe.

At the base and on the summit of society, in all ranks of life, in all grades of human condition, this new welfare became visible. In 1534, considering that the streets of London were "very noyous and foul, and in many places thereof very jeopardous to all people passing and repassing, as well on horseback as on foot," Henry VIII. began the paving of the city. New streets covered the open spaces where the young men used to run races and to wrestle. Every year the number of taverns, theatres, gambling rooms, bear-gardens, increased. Before the time of Elizabeth the country-houses of gentlemen were little more than straw-thatched cottages, plastered with the coarsest clay, lighted only by trellises. "Howbeit," says Harrison (1580), "such as be latelie builded are commonlie either of bricke or hard stone, or both; their roomes large and comelie, and houses of office further distant from their lodgings." The old wooden houses were covered with plaster, "which, beside the delectable whitenesse of the stuffe itselfe, is laied on so even and smoothlie, as nothing in my judgment can be done with more exactnesse."[1] This open admiration shows from what hovels they had escaped. Glass was at last employed for windows, and the bare walls were covered with hangings, on which visitors might see, with delight and astonishment, plants, animals, figures. They began to use stoves, and experienced the unwonted pleasure of being warm. Harrison notes three important changes which had taken place in the farm-houses of his time:

"One is, the multitude of chimnies lately erected, whereas in

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, 1817, i. v. 72 *et passim*.

their yoong daies there were not above two or three, if so manie, in most uplandishe townes of the realme. . . . The second is the great (although not generall), amendment of lodging, for our fathers (yea and we ourselves also) have lien full oft upon straw pallets, on rough mats covered onelie with a sheet, under coverlets made of dagswain, or hop-harlots, and a good round log under their heads, insteed of a bolster or pillow. If it were so that the good man of the house, had within seven yeares after his marriage purchased a matteres or flockebed, and thereto a sacke of chaffe to rest his head upon, he thought himselfe to be as well lodged as the lord of the towne. . . . Pillowes (said they) were thought meet onelie for women in childbed. . . . The third thing is the exchange of vessell, as of treene platters into pewter, and wodden spoones into silver or tin; for so common was all sorts of treene stuff in old time, that a man should hardlie find four peeces of pewter (of which one was peradventure a salt) in a good farmers house."[1]

It is not possession, but acquisition, which gives men pleasure and sense of power; they observe sooner a small happiness, new to them, than a great happiness which is old. It is not when all is good, but when all is better, that they see the bright side of life, and are tempted to make a holiday of it. This is why at this period they did make a holiday of it, a splendid show, so like a picture that it fostered painting in Italy, so like a piece of acting, that it produced the drama in England. Now that the axe and sword of the civil wars had beaten down the independent nobility, and the abolition of the law of maintenance had destroyed the petty royalty of each great feudal baron, the lords quitted their sombre castles, battlemented fortresses, surrounded by stagnant water, pierced with narrow windows, a sort of stone breastplates of no use but to

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. v. 102.

preserve the life of their master. They flock into new palaces, with vaulted roofs and turrets, covered with fantastic and manifold ornaments, adorned with terraces and vast staircases, with gardens, fountains, statues, such as were the palaces of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, half Gothic and half Italian,[1] whose convenience, splendour, and symmetry announced already habits of society and the taste for pleasure. They came to court and abandoned their old manners; the four meals which scarcely sufficed their former voracity were reduced to two; gentlemen soon became refined, placing their glory in the elegance and singularity of their amusements and their clothes. They dressed magnificently in splendid materials, with the luxury of men who rustle silk and make gold sparkle for the first time: doublets of scarlet satin; cloaks of sable, costing a thousand ducats; velvet shoes, embroidered with gold and silver, covered with rosettes and ribbons; boots with falling tops, from whence hung a cloud of lace, embroidered with figures of birds, animals, constellations, flowers in silver, gold, or precious stones; ornamented shirts costing ten pounds a piece. "It is a common thing to put a thousand goats and a hundred oxen on a coat, and to carry a whole manor on one's back."[2] The costumes of the time were like shrines. When Elizabeth died, they found three thousand dresses in her wardrobe. Need we speak of the monstrous ruffs of the ladies, their puffed out dresses, their stomachers stiff with diamonds? As a singular sign of the times, the men were more

[1] This was called the Tudor style. Under James I., in the hands of Inigo Jones, it became entirely Italian, approaching the antique.

[2] Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821. Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. Turnbull, 1836.

changeable and more bedecked than they. Harrison says:

"Such is our mutabilitie, that to daie there is none to the Spanish guise, to morrow the French toies are most fine and delectable, yer long no such apparell as that which is after the high Alman fashion, by and by the Turkish maner is generallie best liked of, otherwise the Morisco gowns, the Barbarian sleeves . . . and the short French breeches. . . . And as these fashions are diverse, so likewise it is a world to see the costlinesse and the curiositie; the excesse and the vanitie; the pompe and the braverie; the change and the varietie; and finallie, the ficklenesse and the follie that is in all degrees."[1]

Folly, it may have been, but poetry likewise. There was something more than puppyism in this masquerade of splendid costume. The overflow of inner sentiment found this issue, as also in drama and poetry. It was an artistic spirit which induced it. There was an incredible outgrowth of living forms from their brains. They acted like their engravers, who give us in their frontispieces a prodigality of fruits, flowers, active figures, animals, gods, and pour out and confuse the whole treasure of nature in every corner of their paper. They must enjoy the beautiful; they would be happy through their eyes; they perceive in consequence naturally the relief and energy of forms. From the accession of Henry VIII. to the death of James I. we find nothing but tournaments, processions, public entries, masquerades. First come the royal banquets, coronation displays, large and noisy pleasures of Henry VIII. Wolsey entertains him

"In so gorgeous a sort and costlie maner, that it was an heaven to behold. There wanted no dames or damosels meet or apt to

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, ii. 6, 87.

danse with the maskers, or to garnish the place for the time: then was there all kind of musike and harmonie, with fine voices both of men and children. On a time the king came suddenlie thither in a maske with a dozen maskers all in garments like sheepheards, made of fine cloth of gold, and crimosin sattin paned, . . . having sixteene torch-bearers. . . . In came a new banket before the king wherein were served two hundred diverse dishes, of costlie devises and subtilities. Thus passed they foorth the night with banketting, dansing, and other triumphs, to the great comfort of the king, and pleasant regard of the nobilitie there assembled."[1]

Count, if you can, the mythological entertainments, the theatrical receptions, the open-air operas played before Elizabeth, James, and their great lords.[2] At Kenilworth the pageants lasted ten days. There was everything; learned recreations, novelties, popular plays, sanguinary spectacles, coarse farces, juggling and feats of skill, allegories, mythologies, chivalric exhibitions, rustic and national commemorations. At the same time, in this universal outburst and sudden expanse, men become interested in themselves, find their life desirable, worthy of being represented and put on the stage complete; they play with it, delight in looking upon it, love its ups and downs, and make of it a work of art. The queen is received by a sibyl, then by giants of the time of Arthur, then by the Lady of the Lake, Sylvanus, Pomona, Ceres, and Bacchus, every divinity in turn presents her with the first fruits of his empire. Next day, a savage, dressed in moss and ivy, discourses before her with Echo in her praise. Thirteen bears are set fighting against

[1] Holinshed (1586), 1808, 6 vols. iii. 763 *et passim.*

[2] Holinshed, iii., *Reign of Henry VIII. Elizabeth and James Progresses*, by Nichols.

dogs. An Italian acrobat performs wonderful feats before the whole assembly. A rustic marriage takes place before the queen, then a sort of comic fight amongst the peasants of Coventry, who represent the defeat of the Danes. As she is returning from the chase, Triton, rising from the lake, prays her, in the name of Neptune, to deliver the enchanted lady, pursued by a cruel knight, *Syr Bruse sauns Pitee*. Presently the lady appears, surrounded by nymphs, followed close by Proteus, who is borne by an enormous dolphin. Concealed in the dolphin, a band of musicians with a chorus of ocean-deities, sing the praise of the powerful, beautiful, chaste queen of England.[1] You perceive that comedy is not confined to the theatre; the great of the realm and the queen herself become actors. The cravings of the imagination are so keen, that the court becomes a stage. Under James I., every year, on Twelfth-day, the queen, the chief ladies and nobles, played a piece called a Masque, a sort of allegory combined with dances, heightened in effect by decorations and costumes of great splendour, of which the mythological paintings of Rubens can alone give an idea:—

"The attire of the lords was from the antique Greek statues. On their heads they wore Persic crowns, that were with scrolls of gold plate turned outward, and wreathed about with a carnation and silver net-lawn. Their bodies were of carnation cloth of silver; to express the naked, in manner of the Greek thorax, girt under the breasts with a broad belt of cloth of gold, fastened with jewels; the mantles were of coloured silke; the first, sky-colour; the second, pearl-colour; the third, flame colour; the fourth, tawny. The ladies attire was of white cloth of silver, wrought with Juno's birds and fruits; a loose under garment,

[1] Laneham's Entertainment at Killingworth Castle, 1575. Nichol's *Progresses*, vol. i. London 1788.

full gathered, of carnation, striped with silver, and parted with a golden zone; beneath that, another flowing garment, of watchet cloth of silver, laced with gold; their hair carelessly bound under the circle of a rare and rich coronet, adorned with all variety, and choice of jewels; from the top of which flowed a transparent veil, down to the ground. Their shoes were azure and gold, set with rubies and diamonds."[1]

I abridge the description, which is like a fairy tale. Fancy that all these costumes, this glitter of materials, this sparkling of diamonds, this splendour of nudities, was displayed daily at the marriage of the great, to the bold sounds of a pagan epithalamium. Think of the feasts which the Earl of Carlisle introduced, where was served first of all a table loaded with sumptuous viands, as high as a man could reach, in order to remove it presently, and replace it by another similar table. This prodigality of magnificence, these costly follies, this unbridling of the imagination, this intoxication of eye and ear, this comedy played by the lords of the realm, showed, like the pictures of Rubens, Jordaens, and their Flemish contemporaries, so open an appeal to the senses, so complete a return to nature, that our chilled and gloomy age is scarcely able to imagine it.[2]

III.

To vent the feelings, to satisfy the heart and eyes, to set free boldly on all the roads of existence the pack of appetites and instincts, this was the craving which the manners of the time betrayed. It was "merry England,"

[1] Ben Jonson's works, ed. Gifford, 1816, 9 vols. *Masque of Hymen*, vol. vii. 76.

[2] Certain private letters also describe the court of Elizabeth as a place where there was little piety or practice of religion, and where all enormities reigned in the highest degree.

as they called it then. It was not yet stern and constrained. It expanded widely, freely, and rejoiced to find itself so expanded. No longer at court only was the drama found, but in the village. Strolling companies betook themselves thither, and the country folk supplied any deficiencies, when necessary. Shakspeare saw, before he depicted them, stupid fellows, carpenters, joiners, bellows-menders, play Pyramus and Thisbe, represent the lion roaring as gently as any sucking dove, and the wall, by stretching out their hands. Every holiday was a pageant, in which townspeople, workmen, and children bore their parts. They were actors by nature. When the soul is full and fresh, it does not express its ideas by reasonings; it plays and figures them; it mimics them; that is the true and original language, the children's tongue, the speech of artists, of invention, and of joy. It is in this manner they please themselves with songs and feasting, on all the symbolic holidays with which tradition has filled the year.[1] On the Sunday after Twelfth-night the labourers parade the streets, with their shirts over their coats, decked with ribbons, dragging a plough to the sound of music, and dancing a sword-dance; on another day they draw in a cart a figure made of ears of corn, with songs, flutes, and drums; on another, Father Christmas and his company; or else they enact the history of Robin Hood, the bold archer, around the May-pole, or the legend of Saint George and the Dragon. We might occupy half a volume in describing all these holidays, such as Harvest Home, All Saints, Martinmas, Sheepshearing, above all Christmas, which lasted twelve days, and sometimes six weeks. They eat and drink, junket,

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, chap. v. and vi.

tumble about, kiss the girls, ring the bells, satiate themselves with noise: coarse drunken revels, in which man is an unbridled animal, and which are the incarnation of natural life. The Puritans made no mistake about that. Stubbes says:

"First, all the wilde heades of the parishe, conventying together, chuse them a ground capitaine of mischeef, whan they innoble with the title of my Lorde of Misserule, and hym they crown with great solemnitie, and adopt for their kyng. This kyng anoynted, chuseth for the twentie, fourtie, three score, or a hundred lustie guttes like to hymself to waite uppon his lordely maiestie. . . . Then have they their hobbie horses, dragons, and other antiques, together with their baudie pipers and thunderyng drommers, to strike up the devilles daunce withall: then marche these heathen companie towardes the churche and churche-yarde, their pipers pipyng, their drommers thonderyng, their stumppes dauncyng, their belles rynglyng, their handkercheefes swyngyng about their heades like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishyng amongest the throng; and in this sorte they goe to the churche (though the minister bee at praier or preachyng), dauncyng, and swingyng their handkercheefes over their heades, in the churche, like devilles incarnate, with such a confused noise, that no man can heare his owne voice. Then the foolishe people they looke, they stare, they laugh, they fleere, and mount upon formes and pewes, to see these goodly pageauntes, solemnized in this sort. Then after this, aboute the churche they goe againe and againe, and so forthe into the churche-yarde, where they have commonly their sommer haules, their bowers, arbours, and banquettyng houses set up, wherein they feaste, banquet, and daunce all that daie, and peradventure all that night too. And thus these terrestriall furies spend the Sabbaoth daie! . . . An other sorte of fantasticall fooles bringe to these helhoundes (the Lorde of Misrule and his complices) some bread, some good ale, some newe cheese, some olde cheese, some custardes, some cakes, some flaunes, some tartes, some creame, some meate, some one thing, some an other."

He continues thus:

"Against Maie, every parishe, towne and village assemble themselves together, bothe men, women, and children, olde and yong, even all indifferently; they goe to the woodes where they spende all the night in pleasant pastymes, and in the mornyng they returne, bringing with them birch, bowes, and branches of trees, to deck their assemblies withall. But their cheefest iewell they bringe from thence is their Maie poole, whiche they bring home with great veneration, as thus: They have twenty or fourtie yoke of oxen, every ox havyng a sweete nosegaie of flowers tyed on the tippe of his hornes, and these oxen, drawe home this Maie poole (this stinckyng idoll rather) . . . and thus beyng reared up, they strawe the grounde aboute, binde greene boughes about it, sett up sommer haules, bowers, and arbours hard by it; and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce aboute it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idolles. . . . Of a hundred maides goyng to the woode over night, there have scarcely the third parte returned home againe undefiled."[1]

"On Shrove Tuesday," says another,[2] "at the sound of a bell, the folk become insane, thousands at a time, and forget all decency and common sense. . . . It is to Satan and the devil that they pay homage and do sacrifice to in these abominable pleasures." It is in fact to nature, to the ancient Pan, to Freya, to Hertha, her sisters, to the old Teutonic deities who survived the middle-age. At this period, in the temporary decay of Christianity, and the sudden advance of corporal well-being, man adored himself, and there endured no life within him but that of paganism.

[1] Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, p. 168 *et passim*.

[2] Hentzner's *Travels in England* (Bentley's translation). He thought that the figure carried about in the Harvest Home represented Ceres.

IV.

To sum up, observe the process of ideas at this time. A few sectarians, chiefly in the towns and of the people, clung gloomily to the Bible. But the court and the men of the world sought their teachers and their heroes from pagan Greece and Rome. About 1490[1] they began to read the classics; one after the other they translated them; it was soon the fashion to read them in the original. Queen Elizabeth, Jane Grey, the Duchess of Norfolk, the Countess of Arundel, and many other ladies, were conversant with Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero in the original, and appreciated them. Gradually, by an insensible change, men were raised to the level of the great and healthy minds who had freely handled ideas of all kinds fifteen centuries before. They comprehended not only their language, but their thought; they did not repeat lessons from, but held conversations with them; they were their equals, and found in them intellects as manly as their own. For they were not scholastic cavillers, miserable compilers, repulsive pedants, like the professors of jargon whom the middle-age had set over them, like gloomy Duns Scotus, whose leaves Henry VIII.'s Visitors scattered to the winds. They were gentlemen, statesmen, the most polished and best educated men in the world, who knew how to speak, and drew their ideas not from books, but from things, living ideas, and which entered of themselves into living souls. Across the train of hooded schoolmen and sordid cavillers the two adult and thinking ages were united, and the moderns, silencing the infan-

[1] Warton, vol. ii. sect. 35. Before 1600 all the great poets were translated into English, and between 1550 and 1616 all the great historians of Greece and Rome. Lyly in 1500 first taught Greek in public.

tine or snuffling voices of the middle-age, condescended only to converse with the noble ancients. They accepted their gods, at least they understand them, and keep them by their side. In poems, festivals, on hangings, almost in all ceremonies, they appear, not restored by pedantry merely, but kept alive by sympathy, and endowed by the arts with a life as flourishing and almost as profound as that of their earliest birth. After the terrible night of the middle-age, and the dolorous legends of spirits and the damned, it was a delight to see again Olympus shining upon us from Greece; its heroic and beautiful deities once more ravishing the heart of men; they raised and instructed this young world by speaking to it the language of passion and genius; and this age of strong deeds, free sensuality, bold invention, had only to follow its own bent, in order to discover in them its masters and the eternal promoters of liberty and beauty.

Nearer still was another paganism, that of Italy; the more seductive because more modern, and because it circulates fresh sap in an ancient stock; the more attractive, because more sensuous and present, with its worship of force and genius, of pleasure and voluptuousness. The rigorists knew this well, and were shocked at it. Ascham writes:

"These bee the inchantementes of Circes, brought out of Italie to marre mens maners in England; much, by example of ill life, but more by preceptes of fonde bookes, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London. . . . There bee moe of these ungratious bookes set out in Printe wythin these fewe monethes, than have bene sene in England many score yeares before. . . . Than they have in more reverence the triumphes of Petrarche: than the Genesis of Moses: They

make more account of Tullies offices, than S. Paules epistles: of a tale in Bocace than a storie of the Bible."[1]

In fact, at that time Italy clearly led in everything, and civilisation was to be drawn thence, as from its spring. What is this civilisation which is thus imposed on the whole of Europe, whence every science and every elegance comes, whose laws are obeyed in every court, in which Surrey, Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare sought their models and their materials? It was pagan in its elements and its birth; in its language, which is but Latin, hardly changed; in its Latin traditions and recollections, which no gap has interrupted; in its constitution, whose old municipal life first led and absorbed the feudal life; in the genius of its race, in which energy and joy always abounded. More than a century before other nations,—from the time of Petrarch, Rienzi, Boccaccio,—the Italians began to recover the lost antiquity, to set free the manuscripts buried in the dungeons of France and Germany, to restore, interpret, comment upon, study the ancients, to make themselves Latin in heart and mind, to compose in prose and verse with the polish of Cicero and Virgil, to hold sprightly converse and intellectual pleasures as the ornament and the fairest flower of life.[2] They adopt not merely the externals of the life of the ancients, but its very essence, that is, preoccupation with the present life, forgetfulness of the future, the appeal to the senses, the

[1] Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), ed. Arber, 1870, first book, 78 *et passim.*

[2] Ma il vero e principal ornemento dell' animo in ciascuno penso io che siano le lettere, benchè i Franchesi solamente conoscano la nobilità dell'arme . . . et tutti i litterati tengon per vilissimi huomini. Castiglione, *il Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 112.

renunciation of Christianity. "We must enjoy," sang their first poet, Lorenzo de Medici, in his pastorals and triumphal songs: "there is no certainty of to-morrow." In Pulci the mocking incredulity breaks out, the bold and sensual gaiety, all the audacity of the free-thinkers, who kicked aside in disgust the worn-out monkish frock of the middle age. It was he who, in a jesting poem, puts at the beginning of each canto a Hosanna, an In principio, or a sacred text from the mass-book.[1] When he had been inquiring what the soul was, and how it entered the body, he compared it to jam covered up in white bread quite hot. What would become of it in the other world? "Some people think they will there discover becafico's, plucked ortolans, excellent wine, good beds, and therefore they follow the monks, walking behind them. As for us, dear friend, we shall go into the black valley, where we shall hear no more Alleluias." If you wish for a more serious thinker, listen to the great patriot, the Thucydides of the age, Machiavelli, who, contrasting Christianity and paganism, says that the first places "supreme happiness in humility, abjection, contempt for human things, while the other makes the sovereign good consist in greatness of soul, force of body, and all the qualities which make men to be feared." Whereon he boldly concludes that Christianity teaches man "to support evils, and not to do great deeds;" he discovers in that inner weakness the cause of all oppressions; declares that "the wicked saw that they could tyrannise without fear over men, who, in order to get to paradise, were more disposed to suffer than to avenge injuries." Through such sayings, in spite of his con-

[1] See Burchard (the Pope's Steward), account of the festival at which Lucretia Borgia was present. Letters of Aretinus. *Life of Cellini*, etc.

strained genuflexions, we can see which religion he prefers. The ideal to which all efforts were turning, on which all thoughts depended, and which completely raised this civilisation, was the strong and happy man, possessing all the powers to accomplish his wishes, and disposed to use them in pursuit of his happiness.

If you would see this idea in its grandest operation, you must seek it in the arts, such as Italy made them and carried throughout Europe, raising or transforming the national schools with such originality and vigour, that all art likely to survive is derived from hence, and the population of living figures with which they have covered our walls, denotes, like Gothic architecture or French tragedy, a unique epoch of human intelligence. The attenuated mediæval Christ—a miserable, distorted, and bleeding earth-worm; the pale and ugly Virgin—a poor old peasant woman, fainting beside the cross of her Son; ghastly martyrs, dried up with fasts, with entranced eyes; knotty-fingered saints with sunken chests,—all the touching or lamentable visions of the middle-age have vanished: the train of godheads which are now developed show nothing but flourishing frames, noble, regular features, and fine easy gestures; the names, the names only, are Christian. The new Jesus is a "crucified Jupiter," as Pulci called him; the Virgins which Raphael sketched naked, before covering them with garments,[1] are beautiful girls, quite earthly, related to the Fornarina. The saints which Michel Angelo arranges and contorts in heaven in his picture of the Last Judgment are an assembly of athletes, capable of fighting well and daring much. A martyr-

[1] See his sketches at Oxford, and those of Fra Bartolomeo at Florence. See also the Martyrdom of St. Laurence, by Baccio Bandinelli.

dom, like that of Saint Laurence, is a fine ceremony in which a beautiful young man, without clothing, lies amidst fifty men dressed and grouped as in an ancient gymnasium. Is there one of them who had macerated himself? Is there one who had thought with anguish and tears of the judgment of God, who had worn down and subdued his flesh, who had filled his heart with the sadness and sweetness of the gospel? They are too vigorous for that, they are in too robust health; their clothes fit them too well; they are too ready for prompt and energetic action. We might make of them strong soldiers or superb courtesans, admirable in a pageant or at a ball. So, all that the spectator accords to their halo of glory, is a bow or a sign of the cross; after which his eyes find pleasure in them; they are there simply for the enjoyment of the eyes. What the spectator feels at the sight of a Florentine Madonna, is the splendid creature, whose powerful body and fine growth bespeak her race and her vigour; the artist did not paint moral expression as nowadays, the depth of a soul tortured and refined by three centuries of culture. They confine themselves to the body, to the extent even of speaking enthusiastically of the spinal column itself, "which is magnificent;" of the shoulder-blades, which in the movements of the arm "produce an admirable effect." "You will next draw the bone which is situated between the hips. It is very fine, and is called the sacrum."[1] The important point with them is to represent the nude well. Beauty with them is that of the complete skeleton, sinews which are linked together and tightened, the thighs which support the trunk, the strong chest breathing freely, the pliant neck. What

[1] Benvenuto Cellini, *Principles of the Art of Design.*

a pleasure to be naked! How good it is in the full light to rejoice in a strong body, well-formed muscles, a spirited and bold soul! The splendid goddesses reappear in their primitive nudity, not dreaming that they are nude; you see from the tranquillity of their look, the simplicity of their expression, that they have always been thus, and that shame has not yet reached them. The soul's life is not here contrasted, as amongst us, with the body's life; the one is not so lowered and degraded, that we dare not show its actions and functions; they do not hide them; man does not dream of being all spirit. They rise, as of old, from the luminous sea, with their rearing steeds tossing up their manes, champing the bit, inhaling the briny savour, whilst their companions wind the sounding-shell; and the spectators,[1] accustomed to handle the sword, to combat naked with the dagger or double-handled blade, to ride on perilous roads, sympathise with the proud shape of the bended back, the effort of the arm about to strike, the long quiver of the muscles which, from neck to heel, swell out, to brace a man, or to throw him.

[1] *Life of Cellini.* Compare also these exercises which Castiglione prescribes for a well-educated man, in his *Cortegiano*, ed. 1585, p. 55:— "Peró voglio che il nostro cortegiano sia perfetto cavaliere d'ogni sella. . . . Et perchè degli Italiani è peculiar laude il cavalcare benè alla brida, il maneggiar con raggione massimamente cavalli aspri, il corre lance, il giostare, sia in questo de meglior Italiani. . . . Nel torneare, tener un passo, combattere una sbarra, sia buono tra il miglior francesi. . . . Nel giocare a canne, correr torri, lanciar haste e dardi, sia tra Spagnuoli eccellente . . . . Conveniente è ancor sapere saltare, e correre; . . . . ancor nobile exercitio il gioco di palla. . . . Non di minor laude estimo il voltegiar a cavallo.'

§ 2. POETRY.

I.

Transplanted into different races and climates, this paganism receives from each, distinct features and a distinct character. In England it becomes English; the English Renaissance is the Renaissance of the Saxon genius. Invention recommences; and to invent is to express one's genius. A Latin race can only invent by expressing Latin ideas; a Saxon race by expressing Saxon ideas; and we shall find in the new civilisation and poetry, descendants of Cædmon and Adhelm, of Piers Plowman, and Robin Hood.

II.

Old Puttenham says:

"In the latter end of the same king (Henry the eighth) reigne, sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th' elder and Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftaines, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the sweete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Arioste, and Petrarch, they greatly pollished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile"[1]

Not that their style was very original, or openly exhibits the new spirit: the middle-age is nearly ended, but not quite. By their side Andrew Borde, John Bale, John Heywood, Skelton himself, repeat the platitudes of the old poetry and the coarseness of the old style. Their manners, hardly refined, were still half

[1] Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Arber, 1869, book i. ch. 31. p. 74.

feudal; on the field, before Landrecies, the English commander wrote a friendly letter to the French governor of Térouanne, to ask him "if he had not some gentlemen disposed to break a lance in honour of the ladies," and promised to send six champions to meet them. Parades, combats, wounds, challenges, love, appeals to the judgment of God, penances,—all these are found in the life of Surrey as in a chivalric romance. A great lord, an earl, a relative of the king, who had figured in processions and ceremonies, had made war, commanded fortresses, ravaged countries, mounted to the assault, fallen in the breach, had been saved by his servant, magnificent, sumptuous, irritable, ambitious, four times imprisoned, finally beheaded. At the coronation of Anne Boleyn he wore the fourth sword; at the marriage of Anne of Cleves he was one of the challengers at the jousts. Denounced and placed in durance, he offered to fight in his shirt against an armed adversary. Another time he was put in prison for having eaten flesh in Lent. No wonder if this prolongation of chivalric manners brought with it a prolongation of chivalric poetry; if in an age which had known Petrarch, poets displayed the sentiments of Petrarch. Lord Berners, Sackville, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Surrey in the first rank, were like Petrarch, plaintive and platonic lovers. It was pure love to which Surrey gave expression; for his lady, the beautiful Geraldine, like Beatrice and Laura, was an ideal personage, and a child of thirteen years.

And yet, amid this languor of mystical tradition, a personal feeling had sway. In this spirit which imitated, and that badly at times, which still groped for an outlet and now and then admitted into its polished stanzas the old, simple expressions and stale metaphors of

heralds of arms and trouvères, there was already visible the Northern melancholy, the inner and gloomy emotion. This feature, which presently, at the finest moment of its richest blossom, in the splendid expansiveness of natural life, spreads a sombre tint over the poetry of Sidney, Spenser, Shakspeare, already in the first poet separates this pagan yet Teutonic world from the other, wholly voluptuous, which in Italy, with lively and refined irony, had no taste, except for art and pleasure. Surrey translated the Ecclesiastes into verse. Is it not singular, at this early hour, in this rising dawn, to find such a book in his hand? A disenchantment, a sad or bitter dreaminess, an innate consciousness of the vanity of human things, are never lacking in this country and in this race; the inhabitants support life with difficulty, and know how to speak of death. Surrey's finest verses bear witness thus soon to his serious bent, this instinctive and grave philosophy. He records his griefs, regretting his beloved Wyatt, his friend Clère, his companion the young Duke of Richmond, all dead in their prime. Alone, a prisoner at Windsor, he recalls the happy days they have passed together:

"So cruel prison how could betide, alas,
As proud Windsor, where I in lust and joy,
With a Kinges son, my childish years did pass,
In greater feast than Priam's son of Troy.

Where each sweet place returns a taste full sour,
The large green courts, where we were wont to hove,
With eyes cast up into the Maiden's tower,
And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.

The stately seats, the ladies bright of hue.
The dances short, long tales of great delight,

With words and looks, that tigers could but rue;
Where each of us did plead the other's right.

The palme-play, where, despoiled for the game,
With dazed eyes oft we by gleams of love
Have miss'd the ball, and got sight of our dame,
To bait her eyes, which kept the leads above. . . .

The secret thoughts, imparted with such trust;
The wanton talk, the divers change of play;
The friendship sworn, each promise kept so just,
Wherewith we past the winter night away.

And with his thought the blood forsakes the face;
The tears berain my cheeks of deadly hue:
The which, as soon as sobbing sighs, alas!
Up-supped have, thus I my plaint renew:

O place of bliss! renewer of my woes!
Give me account, where is my noble fere?
Whom in thy walls thou dost each night enclose;
To other lief; but unto me most dear.

Echo, alas! that doth my sorrow rue,
Returns thereto a hollow sound of plaint."[1]

So in love, it is the sinking of a weary soul, to which he gives vent:

"For all things having life, sometime hath quiet rest;
The bearing ass, the drawing ox, and every other beast;
The peasant, and the post, that serves at all assays;
The ship-boy, and the galley-slave, have time to take their ease;
Save I, alas! whom care of force doth so constrain,
To wail the day, and wake the night, continually in pain,
From pensiveness to plaint, from plaint to bitter tears,
From tears to painful plaint again; and thus my life it wears."[2]

[1] Surrey's *Poems*, Pickering, 1831, p. 17.

[2] *Ibid.* "The faithful lover declareth his pains and his uncertain joys, and with only hope recomforteth his woful heart," p. 53.

That which brings joy to others brings him grief:

"The soote season, that bud and bloom forth brings,
With green hath clad the hill, and eke the vale.
The nightingale with feathers new she sings;
The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
Summer is come, for every spray now springs;
The hart has hung his old head on the pale;
The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;
The fishes flete with new repaired scale;
The adder all her slough away she slings;
The swift swallow pursueth the flies smale;
The busy bee her honey now she mings;
Winter is worn that was the flowers' bale.
And thus I see among these pleasant things
Each care decays, and yet my sorrow springs!"[1]

For all that, he will love on to his last sigh.

"Yea, rather die a thousand times, than once to false my faith;
And if my feeble corpse, through weight of woful smart
Do fail, or faint, my will it is that still she keep my heart.
And when this carcass here to earth shall be refar'd,
I do bequeath my wearied ghost to serve her afterward."[2]

An infinite love, and pure as Petrarch's; and she is worthy of it. In the midst of all these studied or imitated verses, an admirable portrait stands out, the simplest and truest we can imagine, a work of the heart now, and not of the memory, which behind the Madonna of chivalry shows the English wife, and beyond feudal gallantry domestic bliss. Surrey alone, restless, hears within him the firm tones of a good friend, a sincere counsellor, Hope, who speaks to him thus:

[1] Surrey's *Poems*. "Description of Spring, wherein every thing renews, save only the lover," p. 8. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

" For I assure thee, even by oath,
And thereon take my hand and troth,
That she is one the worthiest,
The truest, and the faithfullest;
The gentlest and the meekest of mind
That here on earth a man may find:
And if that love and truth were gone,
In her it might be found alone.
For in her mind no thought there is,
But how she may be true, I wis;
And tenders thee and all thy heale,
And wishes both thy health and weal;
And loves thee even as far forth than
As any woman may a man;
And is thine own, and so she says;
And cares for thee ten thousand ways.
Of thee she speaks, on thee she thinks;
With thee she eats, with thee she drinks;
With thee she talks, with thee she moans;
With thee she sighs, with thee she groans;
With thee she says 'Farewell mine own!'
When thou, God knows, full far art gone.
And even, to tell thee all aright,
To thee she says full oft 'Good night!'
And names thee oft her own most dear,
Her comfort, weal, and all her cheer;
And tells her pillow all the tale
How thou hast done her woe and bale;
And how she longs, and plains for thee,
And says, 'Why art thou so from me?'
Am I not she that loves thee best!
Do I not wish thine ease and rest?
Seek I not how I may thee please?
Why art thou then so from thine ease?
If I be she for whom thou carest,
For whom in torments so thou farest,

Alas! thou knowest to find me here,
Where I remain thine own most dear.
Thine own most true, thine own most just,
Thine own that loves thee still, and must;
Thine own that cares alone for thee,
As thou, I think, dost care for me;
And even the woman, she alone,
That is full bent to be thine own." [1]

Certainly it is of his wife [2] that he is thinking here, not of an imaginary Laura. The poetic dream of Petrarch has become the exact picture of deep and perfect conjugal affection, such as yet survives in England; such as all the poets, from the authoress of the *Nut-brown Maid* to Dickens,[3] have never failed to represent.

III.

An English Petrarch: no juster title could be given to Surrey, for it expresses his talent as well as his disposition. In fact, like Petrarch, the oldest of the humanists, and the earliest exact writer of the modern tongue, Surrey introduces a new style, the manly style, which marks a great change of the mind; for this new form of writing is the result of superior reflection, which, governing the primitive impulse, calculates and selects with an end in view. At last the intellect has grown capable of self-criticism, and actually criticises itself. It corrects its unconsidered works, infantine and incoherent, at once incomplete and superabundant;

[1] Surrey's *Poems*. "A description of the restless state of the lover when absent from the mistress of his heart," p. 78.

[2] In another piece, *Complaint on the Absence of her Lover being upon the Sea*, he speaks in direct terms of his wife, almost as affectionately.

[3] Greene, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, Shakspeare, Ford, Otway, Richardson, De Foe, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, etc.

it strengthens and binds them together; it prunes and perfects them; it takes from them the master idea, to set it free and to show it clearly. This is what Surrey does, and his education had prepared him for it; for he had studied Virgil as well as Petrarch, and translated two books of the *Æneid*, almost verse for verse. In such company a man cannot but select his ideas and connect his phrases. After their example, Surrey gauges the means of striking the attention, assisting the intelligence, avoiding fatigue and weariness. He looks forward to the last line whilst writing the first. He keeps the strongest word for the last, and shows the symmetry of ideas by the symmetry of phrases. Sometimes he guides the intelligence by a continuous series of contrasts to the final image; a kind of sparkling casket, in which he means to deposit the idea which he carries, and to which he directs our attention from the first.[1] Sometimes he leads his reader to the close of a long flowery description, and then suddenly checks him with a sorrowful phrase.[2] He arranges his process, and knows how to produce effects; he uses even classical expressions, in which two substantives, each supported by its adjective, are balanced on either side of the verb.[3] He collects his phrases in harmonious periods, and does not neglect the delight of the ears any more than of the mind. By his inversions he adds force to his ideas, and weight to his argument. He selects elegant or noble terms, rejects idle words and redundant phrases. Every epithet contains an idea, every metaphor a sentiment. There is eloquence in

[1] *The Frailty and Hurtfulness of Beauty.*
[2] *Description of Spring. A Vow to love faithfully.*
[3] *Complaint of the Lover disdained.*

the regular development of his thought; music in the sustained accent of his verse.

Such is the new-born art. Those who have ideas, now possess an instrument capable of expressing them. Like the Italian painters, who in fifty years had introduced or discovered all the technical tricks of the brush, English writers, in half-a-century, introduce or discover all the artifices of language, period, elevated style, heroic verse, soon the grand stanza, so effectually, that a little later the most perfect versifiers, Dryden, and Pope himself, says Dr. Nott, will add scarce anything to the rules, invented or applied, which were employed in the earliest efforts.[1] Even Surrey is too near to these authors, too constrained in his models, not sufficiently free; he has not yet felt the fiery blast of the age; we do not find in him a bold genius, an impassioned writer capable of wide expansion, but a courtier, a lover of elegance, who, penetrated by the beauties of two finished literatures, imitates Horace and the chosen masters of Italy, corrects and polishes little morsels, aims at speaking perfectly fine language. Amongst semi-barbarians he wears a full dress becomingly. Yet he does not wear it completely at his ease: he keeps his eyes too exclusively on his models, and does not venture on frank and free gestures. He is sometimes as a school-boy, makes too great use of 'hot' and 'cold,' wounds and martyrdom. Although a lover, and a genuine one, he thinks too much that he must be so in Petrarch's manner, that his phrase must be balanced and his image kept up. I had almost said that, in his sonnets of disappointed love, he thinks less often of the strength of love than of the beauty of his

[1] Surrey, ed. Nott.

writing. He has conceits, ill-chosen words; he uses trite expressions; he relates how Nature, having formed his lady, broke the mould; he assigns parts to Cupid and Venus; he employs the old machinery of the troubadours and the ancients, like a clever man who wishes to pass for a gallant. At first scarce any mind dares be quite itself: when a new art arises, the first artist listens not to his heart, but to his masters, and asks himself at every step whether he be setting foot on solid ground, or whether he is not stumbling.

IV.

Insensibly the growth became complete, and at the end of the century all was changed. A new, strange, overloaded style had been formed, destined to remain in force until the Restoration, not only in poetry, but also in prose, even in ceremonial speech and theological discourse,[1] so suitable to the spirit of the age, that we meet with it at the same time throughout the whole of Europe, in Ronsard and d'Aubigné, in Calderon, Gongora, and Marini. In 1580 appeared *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, by Lyly, which was its text-book, its masterpiece, its caricature, and was received with universal admiration.[2] "Our nation," says Edward Blount, "are in his debt for a new English which hee taught them. All our ladies were then his scollers; and that beautie in court who could not parley Euphuesme was as little regarded as shee which now there speakes not French." The ladies knew the phrases

[1] The Speaker's address to Charles II. on his restoration. Compare it with the speech of M. de Fontanes under the Empire. In each case it was the close of a literary epoch. Read for illustration the speech before the University of Oxford, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, i. 193.

[2] His second work, *Euphues and his England*, appeared in 1581.

of Euphues by heart: strange, studied, and refined phrases, enigmatical; whose author seems of set purpose to seek the least natural expressions and the most far-fetched, full of exaggeration and antithesis, in which mythological allusions, reminiscences from alchemy, botanical and astronomical metaphors, all the rubbish and medley of learning, travels, mannerism, roll in a flood of conceits and comparisons. Do not judge it by the grotesque picture that Walter Scott drew of it. Sir Piercie Shafton is but a pedant, a cold and dull copyist; it is its warmth and originality which give this style a true force and an accent of its own. You must conceive it, not as dead and inert, such as we have it to-day in old books, but springing from the lips of ladies and young lords in pearl-bedecked doublet, quickened by their vibrating voices, their laughter, the flash of their eyes, the motion of their hands as they played with the hilt of their swords or with their satin cloaks. They were full of life, their heads filled to overflowing; and they amused themselves, as our sensitive and eager artists do, at their ease in the studio. They did not speak to convince or be understood, but to satisfy their excited imagination, to expend their overflowing wit.[1] They played with words, twisted, put them out of shape, enjoyed sudden views, strong contrasts, which they produced one after another, ever and anon, and in great quantities. They cast flower on flower, tinsel on tinsel: everything sparkling delighted them; they gilded and embroidered and plumed their language like their garments. They cared nothing for clearness, order, common sense; it was a festival and a madness; absurdity pleased them. They knew nothing more tempting than

[1] See Shakspeare's young men. Mercutio especially.

a carnival of splendours and oddities; all was huddled together: a coarse gaiety, a tender and sad word, a pastoral, a sounding flourish of unmeasured boasting, a gambol of a Jack-pudding. Eyes, ears, all the senses, eager and excited, are satisfied by this jingle of syllables, the display of fine high-coloured words, the unexpected clash of droll or familiar images, the majestic roll of well-poised periods. Every one had his own oaths, his elegances, his style. "One would say," remarks Heylyn, "that they are ashamed of their mother-tongue, and do not find it sufficiently varied to express the whims of their mind." We no longer imagine this inventiveness, this boldness of fancy, this ceaseless fertility of nervous sensibility: there was no genuine prose at that time; the poetic flood swallowed it up. A word was not an exact symbol, as with us; a document which from cabinet to cabinet carried a precise thought. It was part of a complete action, a little drama; when they read it, they did not take it by itself, but imagined it with the intonation of a hissing and shrill voice, with the puckering of the lips, the knitting of the brows, and the succession of pictures which crowd behind it, and which it calls forth in a flash of lightning. Each one mimics and pronounces it in his own style, and impresses his own soul upon it. It was a song, which, like the poet's verse, contains a thousand things besides the literal sense, and manifests the depth, warmth, and sparkling of the source whence it flowed. For in that time, even when the man was feeble, his work lived; there is some pulse in the least productions of this age; force and creative fire signalise it; they penetrate through bombast and affectation. Lyly himself, so fantastic that he seems to write purposely in defiance of common sense, is at times a

genuine poet; a singer, a man capable of rapture, akin to Spenser and Shakspeare; one of those introspective dreamers, who see dancing fairies, the purpled cheeks of goddesses, drunken, amorous woods, as he says:

> "Adorned with the presence of my love,
> The woods I fear such secret power shall prove,
> As they'll shut up each path, hide every way,
> Because they still would have her go astray."[1]

The reader must assist me, and assist himself. I cannot otherwise give him to understand what the men of this age had the felicity to experience.

Luxuriance and irregularity were the two features of this spirit and this literature,—features common to all the literatures of the Renaissance, but more marked here than elsewhere, because the German race is not confined, like the Latin, by the taste for harmonious forms, and prefers strong impression to fine expression. We must select amidst this crowd of poets; and here is one amongst the first, who exhibits, by his writings as well as by his life, the greatness and the folly of the prevailing manners and the public taste: Sir Philip Sidney, nephew of the Earl of Leicester, a great lord and a man of action, accomplished in every kind of culture; who, after a good training in classical literature, travelled in France, Germany, and Italy; read Plato and Aristotle, studied astronomy and geometry at Venice; pondered over the Greek tragedies, the Italian sonnets, the pastorals of Montemayor, the poems of Ronsard; displaying an interest in science, keeping up an exchange of letters with the learned Hubert Languet; and withal a man of the world, a favourite of Elizabeth, having had enacted in her honour a flattering and comic pastoral; a genuine "jewel of the court;" a judge, like

[1] *The Maid her Metamorphosis.*

d'Urfé, of lofty gallantry and fine language; above all, chivalrous in heart and deed, who wished to follow maritime adventure with Drake, and, to crown all, fated to die an early and heroic death. He was a cavalry officer, and had saved the English army at Gravelines. Shortly after, mortally wounded, and dying of thirst, as some water was brought to him, he saw by his side a soldier still more desperately hurt, who was looking at the water with anguish in his face: "Give it to this man," said he; "his necessity is still greater than mine." Do not forget the vehemence and impetuosity of the middle-age;—one hand ready for action, and kept incessantly on the hilt of the sword or poniard. "Mr. Molineux," wrote he to his father's secretary, "if ever I know you to do so much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak it in earnest." It was the same man who said to his uncle's adversaries that they "lied in their throat;" and to support his words, promised them a meeting in three months in any place in Europe. The savage energy of the preceding age remains intact, and it is for this reason that poetry took so firm a hold on these virgin souls. The human harvest is never so fine as when cultivation opens up a new soil. Impassioned, moreover, melancholy and solitary, he naturally turned to noble and ardent fantasy; and he was so much the poet, that he had no need of verse.

Shall I describe his pastoral epic, the *Arcadia?* It is but a recreation, a sort of poetical romance, written in the country for the amusement of his sister; a work of fashion, which, like *Cyrus* and *Clélie*,[1] is not a monu-

[1] Two French novels of the age of Louis XIV., each in ten volumes, and written by Mademoiselle de Scudéry.—TR.

ment, but a document. This kind of books shows only the externals, the current elegance and politeness, the jargon of the fashionable world,—in short, that which should be spoken before ladies; and yet we perceive from it the bent of the public opinion. In *Clélie*, oratorical development, delicate and collected analysis, the flowing converse of men seated quietly in elegant arm-chairs; in the *Arcadia*, fantastic imagination, excessive sentiment, a medley of events which suited men scarcely recovered from barbarism. Indeed, in London they still used to fire pistols at each other in the streets; and under Henry VIII. and his children, Queens, a Protector, the highest nobles, knelt under the axe of the executioner. Armed and perilous existence long resisted in Europe the establishment of peaceful and quiet life. It was necessary to change society and the soil, in order to transform men of the sword into citizens. The high roads of Louis XIV. and his regular administration, and more recently the railroads and the *sergents de ville*, freed the French from habits of violence and a taste for dangerous adventure. Remember that at this period men's heads were full of tragical images. Sidney's *Arcadia* contains enough of them to supply half-a-dozen epics. "It is a trifle," says the author; "my young head must be delivered." In the first twenty-five pages you meet with a shipwreck, an account of pirates, a half-drowned prince rescued by shepherds, a journey in Arcadia, various disguises, the retreat of a king withdrawn into solitude with his wife and children, the deliverance of a young imprisoned lord, a war against the Helots, the conclusion of peace, and many other things. Read on, and you will find princesses shut up by a wicked fairy, who beats them, and threatens them with

death if they refuse to marry her son; a beautiful queen condemned to perish by fire if certain knights do not come to her succour; a treacherous prince tortured for his wicked deeds, then cast from the top of a pyramid; fights, surprises, abductions, travels: in short, the whole programme of the most romantic tales. That is the serious element: the agreeable is of a like nature; the fantastic predominates. Improbable pastoral serves, as in Shakspeare or Lope de Vega, for an intermezzo to improbable tragedy. You are always coming upon dancing shepherds. They are very courteous, good poets, and subtle metaphysicians. Several of them are disguised princes who pay their court to the princesses. They sing continually, and get up allegorical dances; two bands approach, servants of Reason and Passion; their hats, ribbons, and dress are described in full. They quarrel in verse, and their retorts, which follow close on one another, over-refined, keep up a tournament of wit. Who cared for what was natural or possible in this age? There were such festivals at Elizabeth's 'progresses;' and you have only to look at the engravings of Sadeler, Martin de Vos, and Goltzius, to find this mixture of sensitive beauties and philosophical enigmas. The Countess of Pembroke and her ladies were delighted to picture this profusion of costumes and verses, this play beneath the trees. They had eyes in the sixteenth century, senses which sought satisfaction in poetry—the same satisfaction as in masquerading and painting. Man was not yet a pure reasoner; abstract truth was not enough for him. Rich stuffs, twisted about and folded; the sun to shine upon them, a large meadow studded with white daisies; ladies in brocaded dresses, with bare arms, crowns on their heads, instruments of music

behind the trees,—this is what the reader expects; he cares nothing for contrasts; he will readily accept a drawing-room in the midst of the fields.

What are they going to say there? Here comes out that nervous exaltation, in all its folly, which is characteristic of the spirit of the age; love rises to the thirty-sixth heaven. Musidorus is the brother of Céladon; Pamela is closely related to the severe heroines of *Astrée;*[1] all the Spanish exaggerations abound and all the Spanish falsehoods. For in these works of fashion or of the Court, primitive sentiment never retains its sincerity: wit, the necessity to please, the desire for effect, of speaking better than others, alter it, influence it, heap up embellishments and refinements, so that nothing is left but twaddle. Musidorus wished to give Pamela a kiss. She repels him. He would have died on the spot; but luckily remembers that his mistress commanded him to leave her, and finds himself still able to obey her command. He complains to the trees, weeps in verse: there are dialogues where Echo, repeating the last word, replies; duets in rhyme, balanced stanzas, in which the theory of love is minutely detailed; in short, all the grand airs of ornamental poetry. If they send a letter to their mistress, they speak to it, tell the ink: "Therefore mourne boldly, my inke; for while shee lookes upon you, your blacknesse will shine: cry out boldly my lamentation; for while shee reades you, your cries will be musicke."[2]

Again, two young princesses are going to bed: "They impoverished their clothes to enrich their bed,

[1] *Céladon*, a rustic lover in *Astrée*, a French novel in five volumes, named after the heroine, and written by d'Urfé (d. 1625).—TR.

[2] *Arcadia*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 117.

which for that night might well scorne the shrine of Venus; and there cherishing one another with deare, though chaste embracements; with sweete, though cold kisses; it might seeme that love was come to play him there without dart, or that wearie of his owne fires, he was there to refresh himselfe between their sweete breathing lippes."[1]

In excuse of these follies, remember that they have their parallels in Shakspeare. Try rather to comprehend them, to imagine them in their place, with their surroundings, such as they are; that is, as the excess of singularity and inventive fire. Even though they mar now and then the finest ideas, yet a natural freshness pierces through the disguise. Take another example: "In the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floore against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty varietie recount their wronge-caused sorrow) made them put off their sleep."

In Sidney's second work, *The Defence of Poesie*, we meet with genuine imagination, a sincere and serious tone, a grand, commanding style, all the passion and elevation which he carries in his heart and puts into his verse. He is a muser, a Platonist, who is penetrated by the doctrines of the ancients, who takes things from a lofty point of view, who places the excellence of poetry not in pleasing effect, imitation, or rhyme, but in that creative and superior conception by which the artist creates anew and embellishes nature. At the same time, he is an ardent man, trusting in the nobleness of his aspirations and in the width of his ideas, who puts down the brawling of the shoppy, narrow, vulgar Puritanism,

[1] *Arcadia*, ed. fol. 1629, book ii. p. 114.

and glows with the lofty irony, the proud freedom, of a poet and a lord.

In his eyes, if there is any art or science capable of augmenting and cultivating our generosity, it is poetry. He draws comparison after comparison between it and philosophy or history, whose pretensions he laughs at and dismisses.[1] He fights for poetry as a knight for his lady, and in what heroic and splendid style! He says: "I never heard the old Song of Percie and Douglas, that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet it is sung but by some blinde Crowder, with no rougher voyce, than rude stile; which beeing so evill apparelled in the dust and Cobweb of that uncivill age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindare?"[2]

The philosopher repels, the poet attracts: "Nay hee doth as if your journey should lye through a faire vineyard, at the very first, give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to passe further."[3]

What description of poetry can displease you? Not pastoral so easy and genial? "Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambicke, who rubbes the galled minde, making shame the Trumpet of villanie, with bold and open crying out against naughtinesse?"[4]

At the close he reviews his arguments, and the vibrating martial accent of his poetical period is like a trump of victory: "So that since the excellencies of it (poetry) may bee so easily and so justly confirmed, and

[1] *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. fol. 1629, p. 558: "I dare undertake, that Orlando Furioso, or honest King Arthur, will never displease a soldier: but the quidditie of *Ens* and *prima materia*, will hardly agree with a Corselet." See also, in the same book, the very lively and spirited personification of History and Philosophy, full of genuine talent.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 553. [3] *Ibid.* p. 550. [4] *Ibid.* p. 552.

the low-creeping objections so soone trodden downe, it not being an Art of lyes, but of true doctrine; not of effeminatenesse, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthning man's wit; not banished, but honoured by Plato; let us rather plant more Laurels for to ingarland the Poets heads than suffer the ill-savoured breath of such wrong speakers, once to blow upon the cleare springs of Poesie."[1]

From such vehemence and gravity you may anticipate what his verses will be.

Often, after reading the poets of this age, I have looked for some time at the contemporary prints, telling myself that man, in mind and body, was not then such as we see him to-day. We also have our passions, but we are no longer strong enough to bear them. They unsettle us; we are no longer poets without suffering for it. Alfred de Musset, Heine, Edgar Poe, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Cowper, how many shall I instance? Disgust, mental and bodily degradation, disease, impotence, madness, suicide, at best a permanent hallucination or feverish raving,—these are nowadays the ordinary issues of the poetic temperament. The passion of the brain gnaws our vitals, dries up the blood, eats into the marrow, shakes us like a tempest, and the human frame, such as civilisation has made us, is not substantial enough long to resist it. They, who have been more roughly trained, who are more inured to the inclemencies of climate, more hardened by bodily exercise, more firm against danger, endure and live. Is

[1] *The Defence of Poesie*, p. 560. Here and there we find also verse as spirited as this:

"Or Pindar's Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold."—P. 568.

there a man living who could withstand the storm of passions and visions which swept over Shakspeare, and end, like him, as a sensible citizen and landed proprietor in his small county? The muscles were firmer, despair less prompt. The rage of concentrated attention, the half hallucinations, the anguish and heaving of the breast, the quivering of the limbs bracing themselves involuntarily and blindly for action, all the painful yearnings which accompany grand desires, exhausted them less; this is why they desired longer, and dared more. D'Aubigné, wounded with many sword-thrusts, conceiving death at hand, had himself bound on his horse that he might see his mistress once more, and rode thus several leagues, losing blood all the way, and arriving in a swoon. Such feelings we glean still from their portraits, in the straight looks which pierce like a sword; in that strength of back, bent or twisted; in the sensuality, energy, enthusiasm, which breathe from their attitude or look. Such feelings we still discover in their poetry, in Greene, Lodge, Jonson, Spenser, Shakspeare, in Sidney, as in all the rest. We quickly forget the faults of taste which accompany them, the affectation, the uncouth jargon. Is it really so uncouth? Imagine a man who with closed eyes distinctly sees the adored countenance of his mistress, who keeps it before him all the day; who is troubled and shaken as he imagines ever and anon her brow, her lips, her eyes; who cannot and will not be separated from his vision; who sinks daily deeper in this passionate contemplation; who is every instant crushed by mortal anxieties, or transported by the raptures of bliss: he will lose the exact conception of objects. A fixed idea becomes a false idea. By dint of regarding an object under all its forms, turning it

over, piercing through it, we at last deform it. When we cannot think of a thing without being dazed and without tears, we magnify it, and give it a character which it has not. Hence strange comparisons, over-refined ideas, excessive images, become natural. However far Sidney goes, whatever object he touches, he sees throughout the universe only the name and features of Stella. All ideas bring him back to her. He is drawn ever and invincibly by the same thought: and comparisons which seem far-fetched, only express the unfailing presence and sovereign power of the besetting image. Stella is ill; it seems to Sidney that "Joy, which is inseparate from those eyes, Stella, now learnes (strange case) to weepe in thee."[1] To us, the expression is absurd. Is it so for Sidney, who for hours together had dwelt on the expression of those eyes, seeing in them at last all the beauties of heaven and earth, who, compared to them, finds all light dull and all happiness stale? Consider that in every extreme passion ordinary laws are reversed, that our logic cannot pass judgment on it, that we find in it affectation, childishness, witticisms, crudity, folly, and that to us violent conditions of the nervous machine are like an unknown and marvellous land, where common sense and good language cannot penetrate. On the return of spring, when May spreads over the fields her dappled dress of new flowers, Astrophel and Stella sit in the shade of a retired grove, in the warm air, full of birds' voices and pleasant exhalations. Heaven smiles, the wind kisses the trembling leaves, the inclining trees interlace their sappy branches, amorous earth swallows greedily the rippling water:

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, ed. fol. 1629, 101st sonnet, p. 618.

"In a grove most rich of shade,
Where birds wanton musicke made,
May, then yong, his py'd weeds showing,
New perfum'd with flowers fresh growing,

"Astrophel with Stella sweet,
Did for mutuall comfort meet,
Both within themselves oppressed,
But each in the other blessed. . . .

"Their eares hungry of each word,
Which the deere tongue would afford,
But their tongues restrain'd from walking,
Till their hearts had ended talking.

"But when their tongues could not speake,
Love it selfe did silence breake;
Love did set his lips asunder,
Thus to speake in love and wonder. . . .

"This small winde which so sweet is,
See how it the leaves doth kisse,
Each tree in his best attyring,
Sense of love to love inspiring."[1]

On his knees, with beating heart, oppressed, it seems to him that his mistress becomes transformed;

"Stella, soveraigne of my joy, . . .
Stella, starre of heavenly fire,
Stella, load-starre of desire,
Stella, in whose shining eyes
Are the lights of Cupid's skies. . . .
Stella, whose voice when it speakes
Senses all asunder breakes;
Stella, whose voice when it singeth,
Angels to acquaintance bringeth."[2]

[1] *Astrophel and Stella* (1629), 8th song, p. 603. [2] *Ibid.* 604.

These cries of adoration are like a hymn. Every day he writes thoughts of love which agitate him, and in this long journal of a hundred pages we feel the heated breath swell each moment. A smile from his mistress, a curl lifted by the wind, a gesture,—all are events. He paints her in every attitude; he cannot see her too constantly. He talks to the birds, plants, winds, all nature. He brings the whole world to Stella's feet. At the notion of a kiss he swoons:

"Thinke of that most gratefull time
When thy leaping heart will climbe,
In my lips to have his biding.
There those roses for to kisse,
Which doe breath a sugred blisse,
Opening rubies, pearles dividing."[1]

"O joy, too high for my low stile to show:
O blisse, fit for a nobler state then me:
Envie, put out thine eyes, lest thou do see
What Oceans of delight in me do flow.
My friend, that oft saw through all maskes my wo,
Come, come, and let me powre my selfe on thee;
Gone is the winter of my miserie,
My spring appeares, O see what here doth grow,
For Stella hath with words where faith doth shine,
Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
I, I, O I may say that she is mine."[2]

There are Oriental splendours in the dazzling sonnet in which he asks why Stella's cheeks have grown pale:

"Where be those Roses gone, which sweetned so our eyes?
Where those red cheekes, which oft with faire encrease doth
frame

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, 10th song, p. 610. [2] *Ibid.* sonnet 69, p. 555.

The height of honour in the kindly badge of shame?
Who hath the crimson weeds stolne from my morning skies?[1]

As he says, his "life melts with too much thinking." Exhausted by ecstasy, he pauses; then he flies from thought to thought, seeking relief for his wound, like the Satyr whom he describes:

"Prometheus, when first from heaven hie
He brought downe fire, ere then on earth not seene,
Fond of delight, a Satyr standing by
Gave it a kisse, as it like sweet had beene.

"Feeling forthwith the other burning power,
Wood with the smart with showts and shryking shrill,
He sought his ease in river, field, and bower,
But for the time his griefe went with him still."[2]

At last calm returned; and whilst this calm lasts, the lively, glowing spirit plays like a flickering flame on the surface of the deep brooding fire. His love-songs and word-portraits, delightful pagan and chivalric fancies, seem to be inspired by Petrarch or Plato. We feel the charm and sportiveness under the seeming affectation:

"Faire eyes, sweete lips, deare heart, that foolish I
Could hope by Cupids helpe on you to pray;
Since to himselfe he doth your gifts apply,
As his maine force, choise sport, and easefull stray.

"For when he will see who dare him gainsay,
Then with those eyes he lookes, lo by and by
Each soule doth at Loves feet his weapons lay,
Glad if for her he give them leave to die.

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 102, p. 614.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 525: this sonnet is headed E. D. Wood, in his *Athen. Oxon.* i., says it was written by Sir Edward Dyer, Chancellor of the Most noble Order of the Garter.—TR.

"When he will play, then in her lips he is,
Where blushing red, that Loves selfe them doth love,
With either lip he doth the other kisse:
But when he will for quiets sake remove
From all the world, her heart is then his rome,
Where well he knowes, no man to him can come." [1]

Both heart and sense are captive here. If he finds the eyes of Stella more beautiful than anything in the world, he finds her soul more lovely than her body. He is a Platonist when he recounts how Virtue, wishing to be loved of men, took Stella's form to enchant their eyes, and make them see the heaven which the inner sense reveals to heroic souls. We recognise in him that entire submission of heart, love turned into a religion, perfect passion which asks only to grow, and which, like the piety of the mystics, finds itself always too insignificant when it compares itself with the object loved:

"My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toyes,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoyle it with vaine annoyes,
I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend:
I see and yet no greater sorrow take,
Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake." [2]

At last, like Socrates in the banquet, he turns his eyes to deathless beauty, heavenly brightness:

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,
And thou my minde aspire to higher things:
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings. . . .
O take fast hold, let that light be thy guide,
In this small course which birth drawes out to death." [3]

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet 43, p. 545.
[2] *Ibid.* sonnet 18, p. 573. [3] Last sonnet, p. 539.

Divine love continues the earthly love; he was imprisoned in this, and frees himself. By this nobility, these lofty aspirations, recognise one of those serious souls of which there are so many in the same climate and race. Spiritual instincts pierce through the dominant paganism, and ere they make Christians, make Platonists.

V.

Sidney was only a soldier in an army; there is a multitude about him, a multitude of poets. In fifty-two years, without counting the drama, two hundred and thirty-three are enumerated,[1] of whom forty have genius or talent: Breton, Donne, Drayton, Lodge, Greene, the two Fletchers, Beaumont, Spenser, Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Wither, Warner, Davison, Carew, Suckling, Herrick;—we should grow tired in counting them. There is a crop of them, and so there is at the same time in Catholic and heroic Spain; and as in Spain it was a sign of the times, the mark of a public want, the index to an extraordinary and transient condition of the mind. What is this condition which gives rise to so universal a taste for poetry? What is it breathes life into their books? How happens it, that amongst the least, in spite of pedantries, awkwardnesses, in the rhyming chronicles or descriptive cyclopedias, we meet with brilliant pictures and genuine love-cries? How happens it, that when this generation was exhausted, true poetry ended in England, as true painting in Italy and Flanders? It was because an epoch of the mind came and passed away,—that, namely, of instinctive and

[1] Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, i. Part 2, ch. 2, 3, 4. Among these 233 poets the authors of isolated pieces are not reckoned, but only those who published or collected their works.

creative conception. These men had new senses, and no theories in their heads. Thus, when they took a walk, their emotions were not the same as ours. What is sunrise to an ordinary man? A white smudge on the edge of the sky, between bosses of clouds, amid pieces of land, and bits of road, which he does not see because he has seen them a hundred times. But for them, all things have a soul; I mean that they feel within themselves, indirectly, the uprising and severance of the outlines, the power and contrast of tints, the sad or delicious sentiment, which breathes from this combination and union like a harmony or a cry. How sorrowful is the sun, as he rises in a mist above the sad sea-furrows; what an air of resignation in the old trees rustling in the night rain; what a feverish tumult in the mass of waves, whose dishevelled locks are twisted for ever on the surface of the abyss! But the great torch of heaven, the luminous god, emerges and shines; the tall, soft, pliant herbs, the evergreen meadows, the expanding roof of lofty oaks,—the whole English landscape, continually renewed and illumined by the flooding moisture, diffuses an inexhaustible freshness. These meadows, red and white with flowers, ever moist and ever young, slip off their veil of golden mist, and appear suddenly, timidly, like beautiful virgins. Here is the cuckoo-flower, which springs up before the coming of the swallow; there the hare-bell, blue as the veins of a woman; the marigold, which sets with the sun, and, weeping, rises with him. Drayton, in his *Polyolbion*, sings

"Then from her burnisht gate the goodly glittring East
Guilds every lofty top, which late the humorous Night
Bespangled had with pearle, to please the Mornings sight;

On which the mirthfull Quires, with their cleere open throats,
Unto the joyfull Morne so straine their warbling notes,
That Hills and Valleys ring, and even the ecchoing Ayre
Seemes all compos'd of sounds, about them everywhere. . . .
Thus sing away the Morne, untill the mounting Sunne,
Through thick exhaled fogs, his golden head hath runne,
And through the twisted tops of our close Covert creeps,
To kiss the gentle Shade, this while that sweetly sleeps."[1]

A step further, and you will find the old gods reappear. They reappear, these living gods—these living gods mingled with things which you cannot help meeting as soon as you meet nature again. Shakspeare, in the *Tempest*, sings:

"Ceres, most bounteous lady thy rich leas
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;
Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;
Thy banks with peonèd and lilied brims,
Which spongy April at thy hest betrims,
To make cold nymphs chaste crowns . . .
Hail, many-colour'd messenger (Iris.) . . .
Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flowers
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown
My bosky acres and my unshrubb'd down."[2]

In *Cymbeline* he says:

"They are as gentle as zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head."[3]

Greene writes:

"When Flora, proud in pomp of all her flowers,
Sat bright and gay,

[1] M. Drayton's *Polyolbion*, ed. 1622, 13th song, p. 214.
[2] Act iv. 1. [3] Act iv. 2.

And gloried in the dew of Iris' showers,
And did display
Her mantle chequered all with gaudy green." [1]

The same author also says:

"How oft have I descending Titan seen,
His burning locks couch in the sea-queen's lap;
And beauteous Thetis his red body wrap
In watery robes, as he her lord had been!" [2]

So Spenser, in his *Faërie Queene*, sings:

"The ioyous day gan early to appeare;
And fayre Aurora from the deawy bed
Of aged Tithone gan herselfe to reare
With rosy cheekes, for shame as blushing red:
Her golden locks, for hast, were loosely shed
About her eares, when Una her did marke
Clymbe to her charet, all with flowers spred,
From heven high to chace the chearelesse darke;
With mery note her lowd salutes the mounting larke." [3]

All the splendour and sweetness of this moist and well-watered land; all the specialties, the opulence of its dissolving tints, of its variable sky, its luxuriant vegetation, assemble thus about the gods, who gave them their beautiful form.

In the life of every man there are moments when, in presence of objects, he experiences a shock. This mass of ideas, of mangled recollections, of mutilated images, which lie hidden in all corners of his mind, are set in motion, organised, suddenly developed like a flower. He is enraptured; he cannot help looking at and admir-

[1] Greene's Poems, ed. Bell, *Eurymachus in Laudem Mirimidæ*, p. 73.
[2] *Ibid. Melicertus' description of his Mistress*, p. 38.
[3] Spenser's *Works*, ed. Todd, 1863, *The Faërie Queene*, i. c. 11, st. 51.

ing the charming creature which has just appeared; he wishes to see it again, and others like it, and dreams of nothing else. There are such moments in the life of nations, and this is one of them. They are happy in contemplating beautiful things, and wish only that they should be the most beautiful possible. They are not pre-occupied, as we are, with theories. They do not excite themselves to express moral or philosophical ideas. They wish to enjoy through the imagination, through the eyes, like those Italian nobles, who, at the same time, were so captivated by fine colours and forms, that they covered with paintings not only their rooms and their churches, but the lids of their chests and the saddles of their horses. The rich and green sunny country; young, gaily-attired ladies, blooming with health and love; half-draped gods and goddesses, masterpieces and models of strength and grace,—these are the most lovely objects which man can contemplate, the most capable of satisfying his senses and his heart—of giving rise to smiles and joy; and these are the objects which occur in all the poets in a most wonderful abundance of songs, pastorals, sonnets, little fugitive pieces, so lively, delicate, easily unfolded, that we have never since had their equals. What though Venus and Cupid have lost their altars? Like the contemporary painters of Italy, they willingly imagine a beautiful naked child, drawn on a chariot of gold through the limpid air; or a woman, redolent with youth, standing on the waves, which kiss her snowy feet. Harsh Ben Jonson is ravished with the scene. The disciplined battalion of his sturdy verses changes into a band of little graceful strophes, which trip as lightly as Raphael's children. He sees his lady approach, sitting on the chariot of Love, drawn

by swans and doves. Love leads the car; she passes calm and smiling, and all hearts, charmed by her divine looks, wish no other joy than to see and serve her for ever.

"See the chariot at hand here of Love,
Wherein my lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty;
And, enamoured, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.
Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth! . . .
Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow,
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!"[1]

What can be more lively, more unlike measured and artificial mythology? Like Theocritus and Moschus, they play with their smiling gods, and their belief becomes a festival. One day, in an alcove of a wood, Cupid meets a nymph asleep:

[1] Ben Jonson's *Poems*, ed. R. Bell. *Celebration of Charis; her Triumph*, p. 125.

"Her golden hair o'erspread her face,
Her careless arms abroad were cast,
Her quiver had her pillow's placed,
Her breast lay bare to every blast." [1]

He approaches softly, steals her arrows, and puts his own in their place. She hears a noise at last, raises her reclining head, and sees a shepherd approaching. She flees; he pursues. She bends her bow, and shoots her arrows at him. He only becomes more ardent, and is on the point of seizing her. In despair, she takes an arrow, and buries it in her lovely body. Lo! she is changed, she stops, smiles, loves, draws near him.

"Though mountains meet not, lovers may.
What other lovers do, did they.
The god of Love sat on a tree,
And laught that pleasant sight to see." [2]

A drop of archness falls into the medley of artlessness and voluptuous charm; it was so in Longus, and in all that delicious nosegay called the *Anthology*. Not the dry mocking of Voltaire, of folks who possessed only wit, and always lived in a drawing-room; but the raillery of artists, lovers whose brain is full of colour and form, who, when they recount a bit of roguishness, imagine a stooping neck, lowered eyes, the blushing of vermilion cheeks. One of these fair ones says the following verses, simpering, and we can even see now the pouting of her lips:

"Love in my bosom like a bee
Doth suck his sweet.
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet.

[1] *Cupid's Pastime*, unknown author, ab. 1621. [2] *Ibid.*

Within my eyes he makes his rest,
His bed amid my tender breast,
My kisses are his daily feast.
And yet he robs me of my rest.
Ah! wanton, will ye!"[1]

What relieves these sportive pieces is their splendour of imagination. There are effects and flashes which we hardly dare quote, dazzling and maddening, as in the *Song of Songs*:

"Her eyes, fair eyes, like to the purest lights
That animate the sun, or cheer the day;
In whom the shining sunbeams brightly play,
Whiles fancy doth on them divine delights.

"Her cheeks like ripened lilies steeped in wine,
Or fair pomegranate kernels washed in milk,
Or snow-white threads in nets of crimson silk,
Or gorgeous clouds upon the sun's decline.

"Her lips are roses over-washed with dew,
Or like the purple of Narcissus' flower . . .

"Her crystal chin like to the purest mould,
Enchased with dainty daisies soft and white,
Where fancy's fair pavilion once is pight,
Whereas embraced his beauties he doth hold.

"Her neck like to an ivory shining tower,
Where through with azure veins sweet nectar runs,
Or like the down of swans where Senesse woons,
Or like delight that doth itself devour.

"Her paps are like fair apples in the prime,
As round as orient pearls, as soft as down;
They never vail their fair through winter's frown,
But from their sweets love sucked his summer time."[2]

[1] *Rosalind's Madrigal.*

[2] Greene's *Poems*, ed. R. Bell, *Menaphon's Eclogue*, p. 41.

"What need compare, where sweet exceeds compare?
Who draws his thoughts of love from senseless things,
Their pomp and greatest glories doth impair,
And mounts love's heaven with overladen wings."[1]

I can well believe that things had no more beauty then than now; but I am sure that men found them more beautiful.

When the power of embellishment is so great, it is natural that they should paint the sentiment which unites all joys, whither all dreams converge,—ideal love, and in particular, artless and happy love. Of all sentiments, there is none for which we have more sympathy. It is of all the most simple and sweet. It is the first motion of the heart, and the first word of nature. It is made up of innocence and self-abandonment. It is clear of reflection and effort. It extricates us from complicated passion, contempt, regret, hate, violent desires. It penetrates us, and we breathe it as the fresh breath of the morning wind, which has swept over flowery meads. The knights of this perilous court inhaled it, and were enraptured, and so rested in the contrast from their actions and their dangers. The most severe and tragic of their poets turned aside to meet it, Shakspeare among the evergreen oaks of the forest of Arden,[2] Ben Jonson in the woods of Sherwood,[3] amid the wide shady glades, the shining leaves and moist flowers, trembling on the margin of lonely springs. Marlowe himself, the terrible painter of the agony of Edward II., the impressive and powerful poet, who wrote *Faustus*, *Tamerlane*, and the *Jew of*

[1] Greene's *Poems*, *Melicertus' Eclogue*, p. 43. [2] *As you Like it.*
[3] *The Sad Shepherd.* See also Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess.*

Malta, leaves his sanguinary dramas, his high-sounding verse, his images of fury, and nothing can be more musical and sweet than his song. A shepherd, to gain his lady-love, says to her:

"Come live with me and be my Love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountains yield.
There we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
There will I make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.
A gown made of the finest wool,
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair linéd slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.
A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my Love. . . .
The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my Love" [1]

[1] This poem was, and still is, frequently attributed to Shakspeare. It appears as his in Knight's edition, published a few years ago. Isaac Walton, however, writing about fifty years after Marlowe's death, attributes it to him. In Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* it is also ascribed to the same author. As a confirmation, let us state that Ithamore, in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, says to the courtesan (Act iv. Sc. 4):

"Thou in those groves, by Dis above,
Shalt live with me, and be my love."—Tr.

The unpolished gentlemen of the period, returning from hawking, were more than once arrested by such rustic pictures; such as they were, that is to say, imaginative and not very citizen-like, they had dreamed of figuring in them on their own account. But while entering into, they reconstructed them; they reconstructed them in their parks, prepared for Queen Elizabeth's entrance, with a profusion of costumes and devices, not troubling themselves to copy rough nature exactly. Improbability did not disturb them; they were not minute imitators, students of manners: they created; the country for them was but a setting, and the complete picture came from their fancies and their hearts. Romantic it may have been, even impossible, but it was on this account the more charming. Is there a greater charm than putting on one side this actual world which fetters or oppresses us, to float vaguely and easily in the azure and the light, on the summit of the cloud-capped land of fairies, to arrange things according to the pleasure of the moment, no longer feeling the oppressive laws, the harsh and resisting framework of life, adorning and varying everything after the caprice and the refinements of fancy? That is what is done in these little poems. Usually the events are such as happen nowhere, or happen in the land where kings turn shepherds and marry shepherdesses. The beautiful Argentile[1] is detained at the court of her uncle, who wishes to deprive her of her kingdom, and commands her to marry Curan, a boor in his service; she flees, and Curan in despair goes and lives two years among the shepherds. One day he meets a beautiful country-woman, and loves her;

[1] *Chalmers' English Poets*, William Warner, *Fourth Book of Albion's England*, ch. xx. p. 551.

gradually, while speaking to her, he thinks of Argentile, and weeps; he describes her sweet face, her lithe figure, her blue-veined delicate wrists, and suddenly sees that the peasant girl is weeping, She falls into his arms, and says, "I am Argentile." Now Curan was a king's son, who had disguised himself thus for love of Argentile. He resumes his armour, and defeats the wicked king. There never was a braver knight; and they both reigned long in Northumberland. From a hundred such tales, tales of the spring-time, the reader will perhaps bear with me while I pick out one more, gay and simple as a May morning. The Princess Dowsabel came down one morning into her father's garden; she gathers honeysuckles, primroses, violets, and daisies; then, behind a hedge, she heard a shepherd singing, and that so finely that she loved him at once. He promises to be faithful, and asks for a kiss. Her cheeks became as crimson as a rose:

> "With that she bent her snow white knee,
> Down by the shepherd kneeled she,
> And him she sweetly kiss'd.
> With that the shepherd whoop'd for joy;
> Quoth he: 'There's never shepherd's boy
> That ever was so blest.'"[1]

Nothing more; is it not enough? It is but a moment's fancy; but they had such fancies every moment. Think what poetry was likely to spring from them, how superior to common events, how free from literal imitation, how smitten with ideal beauty, how capable of creating a world beyond our sad world. In fact, among all these poems there is one truly divine, so

[1] *Chalmers' English Poets*, M. Drayton's *Fourth Eclogue*, iv. p. 436.

divine that the reasoners of succeeding ages have found it wearisome, that even now but few understand it—Spenser's *Faërie Queene.*

One day Monsieur Jourdain, having turned Mamamouchi[1] and learned orthography, sent for the most illustrious writers of the age. He settled himself in his arm-chair, pointed with his finger at several folding-stools for them to sit down, and said:

"I have read your little productions, gentlemen. They have afforded me much pleasure. I wish to give you some work to do. I have given some lately to little Lulli,[1] your fellow-labourer. It was at my command that he introduced the sea-shell at his concerts,—a melodious instrument, which no one thought of before, and which has such a pleasing effect. I insist that you will work out my ideas as he has worked them out, and I give you an order for a poem in prose. What is not prose, you know, is verse; and what is not verse, is prose. When I say, 'Nicolle, bring me my slippers and give me my nightcap,' I speak prose. Take this sentence as your model. This style is much more pleasing than the jargon of unfinished lines which you call verse. As for the subject, let it be myself. You will describe my flowered dressing-gown which I have put on to receive you in, and this little green velvet undress which I wear underneath, to do my morning exercise in. You will set down that this chintz costs a louis an ell. The description, if well worked out will furnish some very pretty paragraphs, and will enlighten the public as to the cost of things. I desire also that you should speak of my mirrors, my carpets, my hangings. My tradesmen will let you have their bills; don't fail to put them in. I shall be glad to read in your works, all fully and naturally set forth, about my father's shop, who, like a real gentleman, sold cloth to

[1] Mons. Jourdain is the hero of Molière's comedy, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, the type of a vulgar and successful upstart; Mamamouchi is a mock title.—TR.

[2] Lulli, a celebrated Italian composer of the time of Molière.—TR.

oblige his friends; my maid Nicolle's kitchen, the genteel behaviour of Brusquet, the little dog of my neighbour M. Dimanche. You might also explain my domestic affairs: there is nothing more interesting to the public than to hear how a million may be scraped together. Tell them also that my daughter Lucile has not married that little rascal Cléonte, but M. Samuel Bernard, who made his fortune as a *fermier-général*, keeps his carriage and is going to be a minister of state. For this I will pay you liberally, half-a-louis for a yard of writing. Come back in a month, and let me see what my ideas have suggested to you."

We are the descendants of M. Jourdain, and this is how we have been talking to the men of genius from the beginning of the century, and the men of genius have listened to us. Hence arise our shoppy and realistic novels. I pray the reader to forget them, to forget himself, to become for a while a poet, a gentleman, a man of the sixteenth century. Unless we bury the M. Jourdain who survives in us, we shall never understand Spenser.

VI.

Spenser belonged to an ancient family, allied to great houses; was a friend of Sidney and Raleigh, the two most accomplished knights of the age—a knight himself, at least in heart; who had found in his connections, his friendships, his studies, his life, everything calculated to lead him to ideal poetry. We find him at Cambridge, where he imbues himself with the noblest ancient philosophies; in a northern country, where he passes through a deep and unfortunate passion; at Penshurst, in the castle and in the society where the *Arcadia* was produced; with Sidney, in whom survived entire the romantic poetry and heroic generosity of the

feudal spirit; at court, where all the splendours of a disciplined and gorgeous chivalry were gathered about the throne; finally, at Kilcolman, on the borders of a beautiful lake, in a lonely castle, from which the view embraced an amphitheatre of mountains, and the half of Ireland. Poor on the other hand,[1] not fit for court, and though favoured by the queen, unable to obtain from his patrons anything but inferior employment; in the end, wearied of solicitations, and banished to his dangerous property in Ireland, whence a rebellion expelled him, after his house and child had been burned; he died three months later, of misery and a broken heart.[2] Expectations and rebuffs, many sorrows and many dreams, some few joys, and a sudden and frightful calamity, a small fortune and a premature end; this indeed was a poet's life. But the heart within was the true poet—from it all proceeded; circumstances furnished the subject only; he transformed them more than they him; he received less than he gave. Philosophy and landscapes, ceremonies and ornaments, splendours of the country and the court, on all which he painted or thought, he impressed his inward nobleness. Above all, his was a soul captivated by sublime and chaste beauty, eminently platonic; one of these lofty and refined souls most charming of all, who, born in the lap of nature, draw thence their sustenance, but soar higher, enter the regions of mysticism, and mount instinctively in order to expand on the confines of a loftier world. Spenser leads us to Milton,

[1] It is very doubtful whether Spenser was so poor as he is generally believed to have been.—TR.

[2] "He died for want of bread, in King Street." Ben Jonson, quoted by Drummond.

and thence to Puritanism, as Plato to Virgil, and thence to Christianity. Sensuous beauty is perfect in both, but their main worship is for moral beauty. He appeals to the Muses:

> "Revele to me the sacred noursery
> Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
> Where it in silver bowre does hidden ly
> From view of men and wicked worlds disdaine!"

He encourages his knight when he sees him droop. He is wroth when he sees him attacked. He rejoices in his justice, temperance, courtesy. He introduces in the beginning of a song, long stanzas in honour of friendship and justice. He pauses, after relating a lovely instance of chastity, to exhort women to modesty. He pours out the wealth of his respect and tenderness at the feet of his heroines. If any coarse man insults them, he calls to their aid nature and the gods. Never does he bring them on his stage without adorning their name with splendid eulogy. He has an adoration for beauty worthy of Dante and Plotinus. And this, because he never considers it a mere harmony of colour and form, but an emanation of unique, heavenly, imperishable beauty, which no mortal eye can see, and which is the masterpiece of the great Author of the worlds.[1] Bodies only render it visible; it does not live in them; charm and attraction are not in things, but in the immortal idea which shines through them:

> "For that same goodly hew of white and red,
> With which the cheekes are sprinckled, shall decay,
> And those sweete rosy leaves, so fairly spred
> Upon the lips, shall fade and fall away
> To that they were, even to corrupted clay:

[1] *Hymns of Love and Beauty; of heavenly Love and Beauty.*

That golden wyre, those sparckling stars so bright,
Shall turne to dust, and lose their goodly light.
But that faire lampe, from whose celestiall ray
That light proceedes, which kindleth lovers fire,
Shall never be extinguisht nor decay;
But, when the vitall spirits doe expyre,
Upon her native planet shall retyre;
For it is heavenly borne, and cannot die,
Being a parcell of the purest skie." [1]

In presence of this ideal of beauty, love is transformed:

"For Love is lord of Truth and Loialtie,
Lifting himself out of the lowly dust,
On golden plumes up to the purest skie,
Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust,
Whose base affect through cowardly distrust
Of his weake wings dare not to heaven fly,
But like a moldwarpe in the earth doth ly." [2]

Love such as this contains all that is good, and fine, and noble. It is the prime source of life, and the eternal soul of things. It is this love which, pacifying the primitive discord, has created the harmony of the spheres, and maintains this glorious universe. It dwells in God, and is God Himself, come down in bodily form to regenerate the tottering world and save the human race; around and within animated beings, when our eyes can pierce outward appearances, we behold it as a living light, penetrating and embracing every creature. We touch here the sublime sharp summit where the world of mind and the world of sense unite; where man, gathering with both hands the loveliest flowers of either, feels himself at the same time a pagan and a Christian.

[1] *A Hymne in Honour of Beautie, l.* 92-105.
[2] *A Hymne in Honour of Love, l.* 176-182.

So much, as a testimony to his heart. But he was also a poet, that is, pre-eminently a creator and a dreamer, and that most naturally, instinctively, unceasingly. We might go on for ever describing this inward condition of all great artists; there would still remain much to be described. It is a sort of mental growth with them; at every instant a bud shoots forth, and on this another and still another; each producing, increasing, blooming of itself, so that after a few moments we find first a green plant crop up, then a thicket, then a forest. A character appears to them, then an action, then a landscape, then a succession of actions, characters, landscapes, producing, completing, arranging themselves by instinctive development, as when in a dream we behold a train of figures which, without any outward compulsion, display and group themselves before our eyes. This fount of living and changing forms is inexhaustible in Spenser; he is always imaging; it is his specialty. He has but to close his eyes, and apparitions arise; they abound in him, crowd, overflow; in vain he pours them forth; they continually float up, more copious and more dense. Many times, following the inexhaustible stream, I have thought of the vapours which rise incessantly from the sea, ascend, sparkle, commingle their golden and snowy scrolls, while underneath them new mists arise, and others again beneath, and the splendid procession never grows dim or ceases.

But what distinguishes him from all others is the mode of his imagination. Generally with a poet his mind ferments vehemently and by fits and starts; his ideas gather, jostle each other, suddenly appear in masses and heaps, and burst forth in sharp, piercing, concentrative words; it seems that they need these

sudden accumulations to imitate the unity and life-like energy of the objects which they reproduce; at least almost all the poets of that time, Shakspeare at their head, act thus. Spenser remains calm in the fervour of invention. The visions which would be fever to another, leave him at peace. They come and unfold themselves before him, easily, entire, uninterrupted, without starts. He is epic, that is, a narrator, not a singer like an ode-writer, nor a mimic like a play-writer. No modern is more like Homer. Like Homer and the great epic-writers, he only presents consecutive and noble, almost classical images, so nearly ideas, that the mind seizes them unaided and unawares. Like Homer, he is always simple and clear: he makes no leaps, he omits no argument, he robs no word of its primitive and ordinary meaning, he preserves the natural sequence of ideas. Like Homer again, he is redundant, ingenuous, even childish. He says everything, he puts down reflections which we have made beforehand; he repeats without limit his grand ornamental epithets. We can see that he beholds objects in a beautiful uniform light, with infinite detail; that he wishes to show all this detail, never fearing to see his happy dream change or disappear; that he traces its outline with a regular movement, never hurrying or slackening. He is even a little prolix, too unmindful of the public, too ready to lose himself and dream about the things he beholds. His thought expands in vast repeated comparisons, like those of the old Ionic poet. If a wounded giant falls, he finds him

"As an aged tree,
High growing on the top of rocky clift,
Whose hart-strings with keene steele nigh hewen be,

The mightie trunck halfe rent with ragged rift,
Doth roll adowne the rocks, and fall with fearefull drift.

Or as a castle, reared high and round,
By subtile engins and malitious slight
Is undermined from the lowest ground,
And her foundation forst, and feebled quight,
At last downe falles; and with her heaped hight
Her hastie ruine does more heavie make,
And yields it selfe unto the victours might:
Such was this Gyaunt's fall, that seemd to shake
The stedfast globe of earth, as it for feare did quake."[1]

He develops all the ideas which he handles. All his phrases become periods. Instead of compressing, he expands. To bear this ample thought and its accompanying train, he requires a long stanza, ever renewed, long alternate verses, reiterated rhymes, whose uniformity and fulness recall the majestic sounds which undulate eternally through the woods and the fields. To unfold these epic faculties, and to display them in the sublime region where his soul is naturally borne, he requires an ideal stage, situated beyond the bounds of reality, with personages who could hardly exist, and in a world which could never be.

He made many miscellaneous attempts in sonnets, elegies, pastorals, hymns of love, little sparkling word pictures;[2] they were but essays, incapable for the most part of supporting his genius. Yet already his magnificent imagination appeared in them; gods, men, landscapes, the world which he sets in motion is a

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, i. c. 8, st. 22, 23.

[2] *The Shepherd's Calendar, Amoretti, Sonnets, Prothalamion, Epithalamion, Muiopotmos, Virgil's Gnat, The Ruines of Time, The Teares of the Muses*, etc.

thousand miles from that in which we live. His *Shepherd's Calendar*[1] is a thought-inspiring and tender pastoral, full of delicate loves, noble sorrows, lofty ideas, where no voice is heard but of thinkers and poets. His *Visions of Petrarch and Du Bellay* are admirable dreams, in which palaces, temples of gold, splendid landscapes, sparkling rivers, marvellous birds, appear in close succession as in an Oriental fairy-tale. If he sings a "Prothalamion," he sees two beautiful swans, white as snow, who come softly swimming down amidst the songs of nymphs and vermeil roses, while the transparent water kisses their silken feathers, and murmurs with joy:

"There, in a meadow, by the river's side.
A flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy,
All lovely daughters of the Flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks, all loose untyde,
As each had bene a bryde;
And each one had a little wicker basket,
Made of fine twigs, entrayled curiously,
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket.
And with fine fingers cropt full feateously
The tender stalkes on hye.
Of every sort, which in that meadow grew,
They gathered some; the violet, pallid blew,
The little dazie, that at evening closes,
The virgin lillie, and the primrose trew,
With store of vermeil roses,
To deck their bridegroomes posies
Against the brydale-day, which was not long:
Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song.

[1] Published in 1589; dedicated to Philip Sidney.

With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe
Come softly swimming downe along the lee;
Two fairer birds I yet did never see;
The snow, which doth the top of Pindus strew,
Did never whiter shew . . .
So purely white they were,
That even the gentle stream, the which them bare,
Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
To wet their silken feathers, least they might
Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre,
And marre their beauties bright,
That shone as heavens light,
Against their brydale day, which was not long:
Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song!"[1]

If he bewails the death of Sidney, Sidney becomes a shepherd; he is slain like Adonis; around him gather weeping nymphs:

"The gods, which all things see, this same beheld,
And, pittying this paire of lovers trew,
Transformed them there lying on the field,
Into one flowre that is both red and blew:
It first growes red, and then to blew doth fade,
Like Astrophel, which thereinto was made.

And in the midst thereof a star appeares,
As fairly formd as any star in skyes:
Resembling Stella in her freshest yeares,
Forth darting beames of beautie from her eyes;
And all the day it standeth full of deow,
Which is the teares, that from her eyes did flow."[2]

His most genuine sentiments become thus fairy-like. Magic is the mould of his mind, and impresses its shape

[1] *Prothalamion*, *l.* 19-54. [2] *Astrophel*, *l.* 181-192.

on all that he imagines or thinks. Involuntarily he robs objects of their ordinary form. If he looks at a landscape, after an instant he sees it quite differently. He carries it, unconsciously, into an enchanted land; the azure heaven sparkles like a canopy of diamonds, meadows are clothed with flowers, a biped population flutters in the balmy air, palaces of jasper shine among the trees, radiant ladies appear on carved balconies above galleries of emerald. This unconscious toil of mind is like the slow crystallisations of nature. A moist twig is cast into the bottom of a mine, and is brought out again a hoop of diamonds.

At last he finds a subject which suits him, the greatest joy permitted to an artist. He removes his epic, from the common ground which, in the hands of Homer and Dante, gave expression to a living creed, and depicted national heroes. He leads us to the summit of fairy-land, soaring above history, on that extreme verge where objects vanish and pure idealism begins: "I have undertaken a work," he says, "to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to every vertue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same; in whose actions and feats of armes and chivalry the operations of that vertue, whereof he is the protector, are to be expressed, and the vices and unruly appetites that oppose themselves against the same, to be beaten downe and overcome."[1] In fact, he gives us an allegory as the foundation of his poem, not that he dreams of becoming a wit, a preacher of moralities, a propounder of riddles. He does not subordinate image to idea; he is a seer, not a philosopher. They are living men and

[1] Words attributed to him by Lodowick Bryskett, *Discourse of Civil Life*, ed. 1606, p. 26.

actions which he sets in motion; only from time to time, in his poem, enchanted palaces, a whole train of splendid visions trembles and divides like a mist, enabling us to catch a glimpse of the thought which raised and arranged it. When in his Garden of Adonis we see the countless forms of all living things arranged in due order, in close compass, awaiting life, we conceive with him the birth of universal love, the ceaseless fertility of the great mother, the mysterious swarm of creatures which rise in succession from her "wide wombe of the world." When we see his Knight of the Cross combating with a horrible woman-serpent in defence of his beloved lady Una, we dimly remember that, if we search beyond these two figures, we shall find behind one, Truth, behind the other, Falsehood. We perceive that his characters are not flesh and blood, and that all these brilliant phantoms are phantoms, and nothing more. We take pleasure in their brilliancy, without believing in their substantiality; we are interested in their doings, without troubling ourselves about their misfortunes. We know that their tears and cries are not real. Our emotion is purified and raised. We do not fall into gross illusion; we have that gentle feeling of knowing ourselves to be dreaming. We, like him, are a thousand leagues from actual life, beyond the pangs of painful pity, unmixed terror, violent and bitter hatred. We entertain only refined sentiments, partly formed, arrested at the very moment they were about to affect us with too sharp a stroke. They slightly touch us, and we find ourselves happy in being extricated from a belief which was beginning to be oppressive.

VII.

What world could furnish materials to so elevated a fancy? One only, that of chivalry; for none is so far from the actual. Alone and independent in his castle, freed from all the ties which society, family, toil, usually impose on the actions of men, the feudal hero had attempted every kind of adventure, but yet he had done less than he imagined; the boldness of his deeds had been exceeded by the madness of his dreams. For want of useful employment and an accepted rule, his brain had laboured on an unreasoning and impossible track, and the urgency of his wearisomeness had increased beyond measure his craving for excitement. Under this stimulus his poetry had become a world of imagery. Insensibly strange conceptions had grown and multiplied in his brains, one over the other, like ivy woven round a tree, and the original trunk had disappeared beneath their rank growth and their obstruction. The delicate fancies of the old Welsh poetry, the grand ruins of the German epics, the marvellous splendours of the conquered East, all the recollections which four centuries of adventure had scattered among the minds of men, had become gathered into one great dream; and giants, dwarfs, monsters, the whole medley of imaginary creatures, of superhuman exploits and splendid follies, were grouped around a unique conception, exalted and sublime love, like courtiers prostrated at the feet of their king. It was an ample and buoyant subject-matter, from which the great artists of the age, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Rabelais, had hewn their poems. But they belonged too completely to their own time, to admit of their belonging to one

which had passed.[1] They created a chivalry afresh, but it was not genuine. The ingenious Ariosto, an ironical epicurean, delights his gaze with it, and grows merry over it, like a man of pleasure, a sceptic who rejoices doubly in his pleasure, because it is sweet, and because it is forbidden. By his side poor Tasso, inspired by a fanatical, revived, factitious Catholicism, amid the tinsel of an old school of poetry, works on the same subject, in sickly fashion, with great effort and scant success. Cervantes, himself a knight, albeit he loves chivalry for its nobleness, perceives its folly, and crushes it to the ground, with heavy blows, in the mishaps of the wayside inns. More coarsely, more openly, Rabelais, a rude commoner, drowns it with a burst of laughter, in his merriment and nastiness. Spenser alone takes it seriously and naturally. He is on the level of so much nobleness, dignity, reverie. He is not yet settled and shut in by that species of exact common sense which was to found and cramp the whole modern civilisation. In his heart he inhabits the poetic and shadowy land from which men were daily drawing further and further away. He is enamoured of it, even to its very language; he revives the old words, the expressions of the middle-age, the style of Chaucer, especially in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. He enters straightway upon the strangest dreams of the old story-tellers, without astonishment, like a man who has still stranger dreams of his own. Enchanted castles, monsters and giants, duels in the woods, wandering ladies, all spring up under his hands, the mediæval fancy with the mediæval generosity;

[1] Ariosto, 1474-1533. Tasso, 1544-1595. Cervantes, 1547-1616. Rabelais, 1483-1553.

and it is just because this world is unreal that it so suits his humour.

Is there in chivalry sufficient to furnish him with matter? That is but one world, and he has another. Beyond the valiant men, the glorified images of moral virtues, he has the gods, finished models of sensible beauty; beyond Christian chivalry he has the pagan Olympus; beyond the idea of heroic will which can only be satisfied by adventures and danger, there exists calm energy, which, by its own impulse, is in harmony with actual existence. For such a poet one ideal is not enough; beside the beauty of effort he places the beauty of happiness; he couples them, not deliberately as a philosopher, nor with the design of a scholar like Goethe, but because they are both lovely; and here and there, amid armour and passages of arms, he distributes satyrs, nymphs, Diana, Venus, like Greek statues amid the turrets and lofty trees of an English park. There is nothing forced in the union; the ideal epic, like a superior heaven, receives and harmonises the two worlds; a beautiful pagan dream carries on a beautiful dream of chivalry; the link consists in the fact that they are both beautiful. At this elevation the poet has ceased to observe the differences of races and civilisations. He can introduce into his picture whatever he will; his only reason is, "That suited;" and there could be no better. Under the glossy-leaved oaks, by the old trunk so deeply rooted in the ground, he can see two knights cleaving each other, and the next instant a company of Fauns who came there to dance. The beams of light which have poured down upon the velvet moss, the green turf of an English forest, can reveal the dishevelled locks and white shoulders of

nymphs. Do we not see it in Rubens? And what signify discrepancies in the happy and sublime illusion of fancy? Are there more discrepancies? Who perceives them, who feels them? Who does not feel, on the contrary, that to speak the truth, there is but one world, that of Plato and the poets; that actual phenomena are but outlines—mutilated, incomplete and blurred outlines—wretched abortions scattered here and there on Time's track, like fragments of clay, half moulded, then cast aside, lying in an artist's studio; that, after all, invisible forces and ideas, which for ever renew the actual existences, attain their fulfilment only in imaginary existences; and that the poet, in order to express nature in its entirety, is obliged to embrace in his sympathy all the ideal forms by which nature reveals itself? This is the greatness of his work; he has succeeded in seizing beauty in its fulness, because he cared for nothing but beauty.

The reader will feel that it is impossible to give in full the plot of such a poem. In fact, there are six poems, each of a dozen cantos, in which the action is ever diverging and converging again, becoming confused and starting again; and all the imaginings of antiquity and of the middle-age are, I believe, combined in it. The knight "pricks along the plaine," among the trees, and at a crossing of the paths meets other knights with whom he engages in combat; suddenly from within a cave appears a monster, half woman and half serpent, surrounded by a hideous offspring; further on a giant, with three bodies; then a dragon, great as a hill, with sharp talons and vast wings. For three days he fights him, and twice overthrown, he comes to himself only by aid of "a gracious ointment." After that there are savage

tribes to be conquered, castles surrounded by flames to be taken. Meanwhile ladies are wandering in the midst of forests, on white palfreys, exposed to the assaults of miscreants, now guarded by a lion which follows them, now delivered by a band of satyrs who adore them. Magicians work manifold charms; palaces display their festivities; tilt-yards provide endless tournaments; sea-gods, nymphs, fairies, kings, intermingle in these feasts, surprises, dangers.

You will say it is a phantasmagoria. What matter, if we see it? And we do see it, for Spenser does. His sincerity communicates itself to us. He is so much at home in this world, that we end by finding ourselves at home in it too. He shows no appearance of astonishment at astonishing events; he comes upon them so naturally, that he makes them natural; he defeats the miscreants, as if he had done nothing else all his life. Venus, Diana, and the old deities, dwell at his gate and enter his threshold without his taking any heed of them. His serenity becomes ours. We grow credulous and happy by contagion, and to the same extent as he. How could it be otherwise? Is it possible to refuse credence to a man who paints things for us with such accurate details and in such lively colours? Here with a dash of his pen he describes a forest for you; and are you not instantly in it with him? Beech trees with their silvery stems, "loftie trees iclad with sommers pride, did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide;" rays of light tremble on the bark and shine on the ground, on the reddening ferns and low bushes, which, suddenly smitten with the luminous track, glisten and glimmer. Footsteps are scarcely heard on the thick beds of heaped leaves; and at distant intervals, on the tall herbage,

drops of dew are sparkling. Yet the sound of a horn reaches us through the foliage; how sweetly yet cheerfully it falls on the ear, amidst this vast silence! It resounds more loudly; the clatter of a hunt draws near; "eft through the thicke they heard one rudely rush;" a nymph approaches, the most chaste and beautiful in the world. Spenser sees her; nay more, he kneels before her:

"Her face so faire, as flesh it seemed not,
But hevenly pourtraict of bright angels hew,
Cleare as the skye, withouten blame or blot,
Through goodly mixture of complexions dew;
And in her cheekes the vermeill red did shew
Like roses in a bed of lillies shed,
The which ambrosiall odours from them threw,
And gazers sence with double pleasure fed,
Hable to heale the sicke and to revive the ded.

In her faire eyes two living lamps did flame,
Kindled above at th' Hevenly Makers light,
And darted fyrie beames out of the same;
So passing persant, and so wondrous bright,
That quite bereav'd the rash beholders sight:
In them the blinded god his lustfull fyre
To kindle oft assayd, but had no might;
For, with dredd maiestie and awfull yre,
She broke his wanton darts, and quenched bace desyre.

Her yvorie forhead, full of bountie brave,
Like a broad table did itselfe dispred,
For Love his loftie triumphes to engrave,
And write the battailes of his great godhed:
All good and honour might therein be red;
For there their dwelling was. And, when she spake,
Sweete wordes, like dropping honny, she did shed;

And 'twixt the perles and rubins softly brake
A silver sound, that heavenly musicke seemd to make.

Upon her eyelids many Graces sate,
Under the shadow of her even browes,
Working belgardes and amorous retrate;
And everie one her with a grace endowes,
And everie one with meekenesse to her bowes:
So glorious mirrhour of celestiall grace,
And soveraine moniment of mortall vowes,
How shall frayle pen descrive her heavenly face,
For feare, through want of skill, her beauty to disgrace!

So faire, and thousand thousand times more faire,
She seemd, when she presented was to sight;
And was yclad, for heat of scorching aire,
All in a silken Camus lilly whight,
Purfled upon with many a folded plight,
Which all above besprinckled was throughout
With golden aygulets, that glistred bright,
Like twinckling starres; and all the skirt about
Was hemd with golden fringe.

Below her ham her weed did somewhat trayne,
And her streight legs most bravely were embayld
In gilden buskins of costly cordwayne,
All bard with golden bendes, which were entayld
With curious antickes, and full fayre aumayld:
Before, they fastned were under her knee
In a rich iewell, and therein entrayld
The ends of all the knots, that none might see
How they within their fouldings close enwrapped bee.

Like two faire marble pillours they were seene,
Which doe the temple of the gods support,
Whom all the people decke with girlands greene,
And honour in their festivall resort;

Those same with stately grace and princely port
She taught to tread, when she herselfe would grace;
But with the woody nymphes when she did play,
Or when the flying libbard she did chace,
She could them nimbly move, and after fly apace.

And in her hand a sharpe bore-speare she held,
And at her backe a bow and quiver gay,
Stuft with steel-headed dartes wherewith she queld
The salvage beastes in her victorious play,
Knit with a golden bauldricke which forelay
Athwart her snowy brest, and did divide
Her daintie paps; which, like young fruit in May,
Now little gan to swell, and being tide
Through her thin weed their places only signifide.

Her yellow lockes, crisped like golden wyre,
About her shoulders weren loosely shed,
And, when the winde emongst them did inspyre,
They waved like a penon wyde dispred
And low behinde her backe were scattered:
And, whether art it were or heedlesse hap,
As through the flouring forrest rash she fled,
In her rude heares sweet flowres themselves did lap,
And flourishing fresh leaves and blossomes did enwrap."[1]

"The daintie rose, the daughter of her morne,
More deare than life she tendered, whose flowre
The girlond of her honour did adorne;
Ne suffered she the middayes scorching powre,
Ne the sharp northerne wind thereon to showre;
But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,
Whenso the froward skye began to lowre;
But, soone as calmed was the cristall ayre,
She did it fayre dispred, and let to florish fayre."[2]

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 3, st. 22-30.
[2] *Ibid.* iii. c. 5, st. 51.

He is on his knees before her, I repeat, as a child on Corpus Christi day, among flowers and perfumes, transported with admiration, so that he sees a heavenly light in her eyes, and angel's tints on her cheeks, even impressing into her service Christian angels and pagan graces to adorn and wait upon her; it is love which brings such visions before him;

> "Sweet love, that doth his golden wings embay
> In blessed nectar and pure pleasures well."

Whence this perfect beauty, this modest and charming dawn, in which he assembles all the brightness, all the sweetness, all the virgin graces of the full morning? What mother begat her, what marvellous birth brought to light such a wonder of grace and purity? One day, in a sparkling, solitary fountain, where the sunbeams shone, Chrysogone was bathing with roses and violets.

> "It was upon a sommers shinie day,
> When Titan faire his beamës did display,
> In a fresh fountaine, far from all mens vew,
> She bath'd her brest the boyling heat t' allay;
> She bath'd with roses red and violets blew,
> And all the sweetest flowers that in the forrest grew.
> Till faint through yrkesome wearines adowne
> Upon the grassy ground herselfe she layd
> To sleepe, the whiles a gentle slombring swowne
> Upon her fell all naked bare displayd." [1]

The beams played upon her body, and "fructified" her. The months rolled on. Troubled and ashamed, she went into the "wildernesse," and sat down, "every sence with sorrow sore opprest." Meanwhile Venus,

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iii. c. 6, st. 6 and 7.

searching for her boy Cupid, who had mutinied and fled from her, "wandered in the world." She had sought him in courts, cities, cottages, promising "kisses sweet, and sweeter things, unto the man that of him tydings to her brings."

"Shortly unto the wastefull woods she came,
Whereas she found the goddesse (Diana) with her crew,
After late chace of their embrewed game,
Sitting beside a fountaine in a rew;
Some of them washing with the liquid dew
From off their dainty limbs the dusty sweat
And soyle, which did deforme their lively hew;
Others lay shaded from the scorching heat
The rest upon her person gave attendance great.
She, having hong upon a bough on high
Her bow and painted quiver, had unlaste
Her silver buskins from her nimble thigh,
And her lanck loynes ungirt, and brests unbraste,
After her heat the breathing cold to taste;
Her golden lockes, that late in tresses bright
Embreaded were for hindring of her haste,
Now loose about her shoulders hong undight,
And were with sweet Ambrosia all besprinckled light."[1]

Diana, surprised thus, repulses Venus, "and gan to smile, in scorne of her vaine playnt," swearing that if she should catch Cupid, she would clip his wanton wings. Then she took pity on the afflicted goddess, and set herself with her to look for the fugitive. They came to the "shady covert" where Chrysogone, in her sleep, had given birth "unawares" to two lovely girls, "as faire as springing day." Diana took one, and made her the purest of all virgins. Venus carried off the other to the

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iii. c. 6, st. 17 and 18.

Garden of Adonis, "the first seminary of all things, that are borne to live and dye;" where Psyche, the bride of Love, disports herself; where Pleasure, their daughter, wantons with the Graces; where Adonis, "lapped in flowres and prëtious spycery," "liveth in eternal bliss," and came back to life through the breath of immortal Love. She brought her up as her daughter, selected her to be the most faithful of loves, and after long trials, gave her hand to the good knight Sir Scudamore.

That is the kind of thing we meet with in the wondrous forest. Are you ill at ease there, and do you wish to leave it because it is wondrous? At every bend in the alley, at every change of the light, a stanza, a word, reveals a landscape or an apparition. It is morning, the white dawn gleams faintly through the trees; bluish vapours veil the horizon, and vanish in the smiling air; the springs tremble and murmur faintly amongst the mosses, and on high the poplar leaves begin to stir and flutter like the wings of butterflies. A knight alights from his horse, a valiant knight, who has unhorsed many a Saracen, and experienced many an adventure. He unlaces his helmet, and on a sudden you perceive the cheeks of a young girl;

> "Which doft, her golden lockes, that were upbound
> Still in a knot, unto her heeles downe traced,
> And like a silken veile in compasse round
> About her backe and all her bodie wound;
> Like as the shining skie in summers night,
> What time the dayes with scorching heat abound,
> Is creasted all with lines of firie light,
> That it prodigious seemes in common peoples sight."[1]

It is Britomart, a virgin and a heroine, like Clorinda

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, iv. c. 1, st. 13.

or Marfisa,[1] but how much more ideal! The deep sentiment of nature, the sincerity of reverie, the ever-flowing fertility of inspiration, the German seriousness, reanimate in this poem classical or chivalrous conceptions, even when they are the oldest or the most trite. The train of splendours and of scenery never ends. Desolate promontories, cleft with gaping chasms; thunder-stricken and blackened masses of rocks, against which the hoarse breakers dash; palaces sparkling with gold, wherein ladies, beauteous as angels, reclining carelessly on purple cushions, listen with sweet smiles to the harmony of music played by unseen hands; lofty silent walks, where avenues of oaks spread their motionless shadows over clusters of virgin violets, and turf which never mortal foot has trod;—to all these beauties of art and nature he adds the marvels of mythology, and describes them with as much of love and sincerity as a painter of the Renaissance or an ancient poet. Here approach on chariots of shell, Cymoënt and her nymphs:

"A teme of dolphins raunged in aray
Drew the smooth charett of sad Cymoënt;
They were all taught by Triton to obay
To the long raynes at her commaundëment:
As swifte as swallowes on the waves they went,
That their brode flaggy finnes no fome did reare,
Ne bubling rowndell they behinde them sent;
The rest, of other fishes drawen weare;
Which with their finny oars the swelling sea did sheare."[2]

[1] Clorinda, the heroine of the infidel army in Tasso's epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered;* Marfisa, an Indian Queen, who figures in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* and also in Boyardo's *Orlando Innamorato.*—TR.

[2] *The Faërie Queene,* iii. c. 4, st. 33.

Nothing, again, can be sweeter or calmer than the description of the palace of Morpheus:

"He, making speedy way through spersed ayre,
And through the world of waters wide and deepe,
To Morpheus house doth hastily repaire.
Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,
And low, where dawning day doth never peepe
His dwelling is; there Tethys his wet bed
Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe
In silver deaw his ever-drouping hed,
Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spred.
And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling downe
And ever-drizzling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard: but careless Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enimyes." [1]

Observe also in a corner of this forest, a band of satyrs dancing under the green leaves. They come leaping like wanton kids, as gay as birds of joyous spring. The fair Hellenore, whom they have chosen for "May-lady," "daunst lively" also, laughing, and "with girlonds all bespredd." The wood re-echoes the sound of their "merry pypes." "Their horned feet the greene gras wore." "All day they daunced with great lustyhedd," with sudden motions and alluring looks, while about them their flock feed on "the brouzes" at their pleasure.[2] In every book we see strange processions pass by, allegorical and picturesque shows, like those

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, i. c. 1, st. 39 and 41. [2] *Ibid.* iii. c. 10, st. 43-45.

which were then displayed at the courts of princes; now a masquerade of Cupid, now of the Rivers, now of the Months, now of the Vices. Imagination was never more prodigal or inventive. Proud Lucifera advances in a chariot "adorned all with gold and girlonds gay," beaming like the dawn, surrounded by a crowd of courtiers whom she dazzles with her glory and splendour: "six unequall beasts" draw her along, and each of these is ridden by a Vice. Idleness "upon a slouthfull asse . . . in habit blacke . . . like to an holy monck," sick for very laziness, lets his heavy head droop, and holds in his hand a breviary which he does not read; gluttony, on "a filthie swyne," crawls by in his deformity, "his belly . . . upblowne with luxury, and eke with fatnesse swollen were his eyne; and like a crane his necke was long and fyne," drest in vine-leaves, through which one can see his body eaten by ulcers, and vomiting along the road the wine and flesh with which he is glutted. Avarice seated between "two iron coffers," "upon a camell loaden all with gold," is handling a heap of coin, with thread-bare coat, hollow cheeks, and feet stiff with gout. Envy "upon a ravenous wolfe still did chaw between his cankred teeth a venemous tode, that all the poison ran about his chaw," and his discoloured garment "ypainted full of eies," conceals a snake wound about his body. Wrath, covered with a torn and bloody robe, comes riding on a lion, brandishing about his head "a burning brond," his eyes sparkling, his face pale as ashes, grasping in his feverish hand the haft of his dagger. The strange and terrible procession passes on, led by the solemn harmony of the stanzas; and the grand music of oft repeated rhymes sustains the imagination in this fantastic world, which, with its

mingled horrors and splendours, has just been opened to its flight.

Yet all this is little. However much mythology and chivalry can supply, they do not suffice for the needs of this poetical fancy. Spenser's characteristic is the vastness and overflow of his picturesque invention. Like Rubens, whatever he creates is beyond the region of all traditions, but complete in all parts, and expresses distinct ideas. As with Rubens, his allegory swells its proportions beyond all rule, and withdraws fancy from all law, except in so far as it is necessary to harmonise forms and colours. For, if ordinary minds receive from allegory a certain weight which oppresses them, lofty imaginations receive from it wings which carry them aloft. Freed by it from the common conditions of life, they can dare all things, beyond imitation, apart from probability, with no other guides but their inborn energy and their shadowy instincts. For three days Sir Guyon is led by the cursed spirit, the tempter Mammon, in the subterranean realm, across wonderful gardens, trees laden with golden fruits, glittering palaces, and a confusion of all worldly treasures. They have descended into the bowels of the earth, and pass through caverns, unknown abysses, silent depths. "An ugly Feend . . . with monstrous stalke behind him stept," without Guyon's knowledge, ready to devour him on the least show of covetousness. The brilliancy of the gold lights up hideous figures, and the beaming metal shines with a beauty more seductive in the gloom of the infernal prison.

> "That Houses forme within was rude and strong,
> Lyke an huge cave hewne out of rocky clifte,
> From whose rough vaut the ragged breaches hong

Embost with massy gold of glorious guifte,
And with rich metall loaded every rifte,
That heavy ruine they did seeme to threatt;
And over them Arachne high did lifte
Her cunning web, and spred her subtile nett,
Enwrapped in fowle smoke and clouds more black than iett.

Both roofe, and floore, and walls, were all of gold,
But overgrowne with dust and old decay,
And hid in darknes, that none could behold
The hew thereof; for vew of cherefull day
Did never in that House itselfe display,
But a faint shadow of uncertein light;
Such as a lamp, whose life does fade away;
Or as the moone, cloathed with clowdy night,
Does show to him that walkes in feare and sad affright.

In all that rowme was nothing to be seene
But huge great yron chests and coffers strong,
All bard with double bends, that none could weene
Them to enforce by violence or wrong;
On every side they placed were along.
But all the grownd with sculs was scattered
And dead mens bones, which round about were flong;
Whose lives, it seemed, whilome there were shed,
And their vile carcases now left unburied. . . .

Thence, forward he him ledd and shortly brought
Unto another rowme, whose dore forthright
To him did open as it had beene taught:
Therein an hundred raunges weren pight,
And hundred fournaces all burning bright;
By every fournace many Feends did byde,
Deformed creatures, horrible in sight;
And every Feend his busie paines applyde
To melt the golden metall, ready to be tryde.

One with great bellowes gathered filling ayre,
And with forst wind the fewell did inflame;
Another did the dying bronds repayre
With yron tongs, and sprinckled ofte the same
With liquid waves, fiers Vulcans rage to tame,
Who, maystring them, renewd his former heat:
Some scumd the drosse that from the metall came;
Some stird the molten owre with ladles great:
And every one did swincke, and every one did sweat . . .

He brought him, through a darksom narrow strayt,
To a broad gate all built of beaten gold:
The gate was open; but therein did wayt
A sturdie Villein, stryding stiffe and bold,
As if the Highest God defy he would:
In his right hand an yron club he held,
But he himselfe was all of golden mould,
Yet had both life and sence, and well could weld
That cursed weapon, when his cruell foes he queld . . .

He brought him in. The rowme was large and wyde,
As it some gyeld or solemne temple weare;
Many great golden pillours did upbeare
The massy roofe, and riches huge sustayne;
And every pillour decked was full deare
With crownes, and diademes, and titles vaine,
Which mortall princes wore whiles they on earth did rayne.

A route of people there assembled were,
Of every sort and nation under skye,
Which with great uprore preaced to draw nere
To th' upper part, where was advaunced hye
A stately siege of soveraine maiestye;
And thereon satt a Woman gorgeous gay,
And richly cladd in robes of royaltye,
That never earthly prince in such aray
His glory did enhaunce, and pompous pryde display . . .

There, as in glistring glory she did sitt,
She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,
Whose upper end to highest heven was knitt,
And lower part did reach to lowest hell." [1]

No artist's dream matches these visions: the glow of the furnaces beneath the vaults of the cavern, the lights flickering over the crowded figures, the throne, and the strange glitter of the gold shining in every direction through the darkness. The allegory assumes gigantic proportions. When the object is to show temperance struggling with temptations, Spenser deems it necessary to mass all the temptations together. He is treating of a general virtue; and as such a virtue is capable of every sort of resistance, he requires from it every sort of resistance alike;—after the test of gold, that of pleasure. Thus the grandest and the most exquisite spectacles follow and are contrasted with each other, and all are supernatural; the graceful and the terrible are side by side,—the happy gardens close by with the cursed subterranean cavern.

"No gate, but like one, being goodly dight
With bowes and braunches, which did broad dilate
Their clasping armes in wanton wreathings intricate:

So fashioned a porch with rare device,
Archt over head with an embracing vine,
Whose bounches hanging downe seemed to entice
All passers-by to taste their lushious wine,
And did themselves into their hands incline,
As freely offering to be gathered;
Some deepe empurpled as the hyacine,
Some as the rubine laughing sweetely red,
Some like faire emeraudes, not yet well ripened. . . .

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 7, st. 28-46.

And in the midst of all a fountaine stood,
Of richest substance that on earth might bee,
So pure and shiny that the silver flood
Through every channell running one might see;
Most goodly it with curious ymageree
Was over-wrought, and shapes of naked boyes,
Of which some seemed with lively iollitee
To fly about, playing their wanton toyes,
Whylest others did themselves embay in liquid ioyes.

And over all of purest gold was spred
A trayle of yvie in his native hew;
For the rich metall was so coloured,
That wight, who did not well avis'd it vew,
Would surely deeme it to bee yvie trew;
Low his lascivious armes adown did creepe,
That themselves dipping in the silver dew
Their fleecy flowres they fearfully did steepe,
Which drops of christall seemd for wantones to weep.

Infinit streames continually did well
Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,
The which into an ample laver fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantitie,
That like a little lake it seemd to bee;
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,
That through the waves one might the bottom see,
All pav'd beneath with jaspar shining bright,
That seemd the fountaine in that sea did sayle upright. . . .

The ioyous birdes, shrouded in chearefull shade,
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet;
Th' angelicall soft trembling voyces made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet;
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the waters fall;
The waters fall with difference discreet,

Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all. . . .

Upon a bed of roses she was layd,
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arayd, or rather disarayd,
All in a vele of silke and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewd more white, if more might bee:
More subtile web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched deaw, do not in th' ayre more lightly flee.

Her snowy brest was bare to ready spoyle
Of hungry eies, which n' ote therewith be fild;
And yet, through languour of her late sweet toyle,
Few drops, more cleare then nectar, forth distild,
That like pure orient perles adowne it trild;
And her faire eyes, sweet smyling in delight,
Moystened their fierie beames, with which she thrild
Fraile harts, yet quenched not, like starry lights
Which sparckling on the silent waves, does seeme more bright."[1]

Do we find here nothing but fairy land? Yes; here are finished pictures true and complete, composed with a painter's feeling, with choice of tints and outlines; our eyes are delighted by them. This reclining Acrasia has the pose of a goddess, or of one of Titian's courtesans. An Italian artist might copy these gardens, these flowing waters, these sculptured loves, those wreaths of creeping ivy thick with glossy leaves and fleecy flowers. Just before, in the infernal depths, the lights, with their long streaming rays, were fine, half-smothered by the darkness; the lofty throne in the vast hall, between the pillars, in the midst of a swarm-

[1] *The Faërie Queene*, ii. c. 12, st. 53-78.

ing multitude, connected all the forms around it by drawing all looks towards one centre. The poet, here and throughout, is a colourist and an architect. However fantastic his world may be, it is not factitious; if it does not exist, it might have been; indeed, it should have been; it is the fault of circumstances if they do not so group themselves as to bring it to pass; taken by itself, it possesses that internal harmony by which a real thing, even a still higher harmony, exists, inasmuch as, without any regard to real things, it is altogether, and in its least detail, constructed with a view to beauty. Art has made its appearance: this is the great characteristic of the age, which distinguishes the *Faërie Queene* from all similar tales heaped up by the middle-age. Incoherent, mutilated, they lie like rubbish, or rough-hewn stones, which the weak hands of the trouvères could not build into a monument. At last the poets and artists appear, and with them the conception of beauty, to wit, the idea of general effect. They understand proportions, relations, contrasts; they compose. In their hands the blurred vague sketch becomes defined, complete, separate; it assumes colour — is made a picture. Every object thus conceived and imaged acquires a definite existence as soon as it assumes a true form; centuries after, it will be acknowledged and admired, and men will be touched by it; and more, they will be touched by its author; for, besides the object which he paints, the poet paints himself. His ruling idea is stamped upon the work which it produces and controls. Spenser is superior to his subject, comprehends it fully, frames it with a view to its end, in order to impress upon it the proper mark of his soul and his genius. Each story is modulated with respect to another,

and all with respect to a certain effect which is being worked out. Thus a beauty issues from this harmony, —the beauty in the poet's heart,—which his whole work strives to express; a noble and yet a cheerful beauty, made up of moral elevation and sensuous seductions, English in sentiment, Italian in externals, chivalric in subject, modern in its perfection, representing a unique and wonderful epoch, the appearance of paganism in a Christian race, and the worship of form by an imagination of the North.

§ 3. Prose.

I.

Such an epoch can scarcely last, and the poetic vitality wears itself out by its very efflorescence, so that its expansion leads to its decline. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the subsidence of manners and genius grows apparent. Enthusiasm and respect decline. The minions and court-fops intrigue and pilfer, amid pedantry, puerility, and show. The court plunders, and the nation murmurs. The Commons begin to show a stern front, and the king, scolding them like a schoolmaster, gives way before them like a little boy. This sorry monarch (James I.) suffers himself to be bullied by his favourites, writes to them like a gossip, calls himself a Solomon, airs his literary vanity, and in granting an audience to a courtier, recommends him to become a scholar, and expects to be complimented on his own scholarly attainments. The dignity of the government is weakened, and the people's loyalty is cooled. Royalty declines, and revolution is fostered. At the same time, the noble chivalric paganism degen-

erates into a base and coarse sensuality. The king, we are told, on one occasion, had got so drunk with his royal brother Christian of Denmark, that they both had to be carried to bed. Sir John Harrington says:

"The ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen to roll about in intoxication. . . . The Lady who did play the Queen's part (in the Masque of the Queen of Sheba) did carry most precious gifts to both their Majesties; but, forgetting the steppes arising to the canopy, overset her caskets into his Danish Majesties lap, and fell at his feet, tho I rather think it was in his face. Much was the hurry and confusion; cloths and napkins were at hand, to make all clean. His Majesty then got up and would dance with the Queen of Sheba; but he fell down and humbled himself before her, and was carried to an inner chamber and laid on a bed of state; which was not a little defiled with the presents of the Queen which had been bestowed on his garments; such as wine, cream, jelly, beverage, cakes, spices, and other good matters. The entertainment and show went forward, and most of the presenters went backward, or fell down; wine did so occupy their upper chambers. Now did appear, in rich dress, Hope, Faith, and Charity: Hope did assay to speak, but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble that she withdrew, and hoped the king would excuse her brevity: Faith . . . left the court in a staggering condition. . . . They were both sick and spewing in the lower hall. Next came Victory, who . . . by a strange medley of versification . . . and after much lamentable utterance was led away like a silly captive, and laid to sleep in the outer steps of the anti-chamber. As for Peace, she most rudely made war with her olive branch, and laid on the pates of those who did oppose her coming. I ne'er did see such lack of good order, discretion, and sobriety in our Queen's days."[1]

Observe that these tipsy women were great ladies.

[1] *Nugæ Antiquæ*, i. 349 *et passim.*

The reason is, that the grand ideas which introduce an epoch, end, in their exhaustion, by preserving nothing but their vices; the proud sentiment of natural life becomes a vulgar appeal to the senses. An entrance, an arch of triumph under James I., often represented obscenities; and later, when the sensual instincts, exasperated by Puritan tyranny, begin to raise their heads once more, we shall find under the Restoration excess revelling in its low vices, and triumphing in its shamelessness.

Meanwhile literature undergoes a change; the powerful breeze which had wafted it on, and which, amidst singularity, refinements, exaggerations, had made it great, slackened and diminished. With Carew, Suckling, and Herrick, prettiness takes the place of the beautiful. That which strikes them is no longer the general features of things; and they no longer try to express the inner character of what they describe. They no longer possess that liberal conception, that instinctive penetration, by which we sympathise with objects, and grow capable of creating them anew. They no longer boast of that overflow of emotions, that excess of ideas and images, which compelled a man to relieve himself by words, to act externally, to represent freely and boldly the interior drama which made his whole body and heart tremble. They are rather wits of the court, cavaliers of fashion, who wish to show off their imagination and style. In their hands love becomes gallantry; they write songs, fugitive pieces, compliments to the ladies. There are no more upwellings from the heart. They write eloquent phrases in order to be applauded, and flattering exaggerations in order to please. The divine faces, the serious or profound looks, the virgin or impassioned

expressions which burst forth at every step in the early poets, have disappeared; here we see nothing but agreeable countenances, painted in agreeable verses. Blackguardism is not far off; we meet with it already in Suckling, and crudity to boot, and prosaic epicurism; their sentiment is expressed before long, in such a phrase as: "Let us amuse ourselves, and a fig for the rest." The only objects they can still paint, are little graceful things, a kiss, a May-day festivity, a dewy primrose, a daffodil, a marriage morning, a bee.[1] Herrick and Suckling

[1] "Some asked me where the Rubies grew,
And nothing I did say;
But with my finger pointed to
The lips of Julia.
Some ask'd how Pearls did grow, and where;
Then spake I to my girle,
To part her lips, and shew me there
The quarelets of Pearl.
One ask'd me where the roses grew;
I bade him not go seek;
But forthwith bade my Julia show
A bud in either cheek."

HERRICK'S *Hesperides*, ed. Walford, 1859; *The Rock of Rubies*, p. 32.

"About the sweet bag of a bee,
Two Cupids fell at odds;
And whose the pretty prize shu'd be,
They vow'd to ask the Gods.
Which Venus hearing, thither came,
And for their boldness stript them;
And taking thence from each his flame,
With rods of mirtle whipt them.
Which done, to still their wanton cries,
When quiet grown sh'ad seen them,
She kist and wip'd their dove-like eyes,
And gave the bag between them."

HERRICK, *Ibid.*; *The Bag of the Bee*, p. 41.

especially produce little exquisite poems, delicate, ever pleasant or agreeable, like those attributed to Anacreon, or those which abound in the *Anthology*. In fact, here, as at the Grecian period alluded to, we are in the decline of paganism; energy departs, the reign of the agreeable begins. People do not relinquish the worship of beauty and pleasure, but dally with them. They deck and fit them to their taste; they cease to subdue and bend men, who enjoy them whilst they amuse them. It is the last beam of a setting sun; the genuine poetic

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Pr'ythee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Pr'ythee, why so pale?
Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Pr'ythee, why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing do't?
Pr'ythee, why so mute?
Quit, quit for shame: this will not move,
This cannot take her;
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her.
The devil take her!"

Sir JOHN SUCKLING'S *Works*, ed. A. Suckling, 1836, p. 70.

"As when a lady, walking Flora's bower,
Picks here a pink, and there a gilly-flower,
Now plucks a violet from her purple bed,
And then a primrose, the year's maidenhead,
There nips the brier, here the lover's pansy,
Shifting her dainty pleasures with her fancy,
This on her arms, and that she lists to wear
Upon the borders of her curious hair;
At length a rose-bud (passing all the rest)
She plucks, and bosoms in her lily breast.

QUARLES. *Stanzas.*

sentiment dies out with Sedley, Waller, and the rhymesters of the Restoration; they write prose in verse; their heart is on a level with their style, and with an exact language we find the commencement of a new age and a new art.

Side by side with prettiness comes affectation; it is the second mark of the decadence. Instead of writing to express things, they write to say them well; they outbid their neighbours, and strain every mode of speech; they push art over on the side to which it had a leaning; and as in this age it had a leaning towards vehemence and imagination, they pile up their emphasis and colouring. A jargon always springs out of a style. In all arts, the first masters, the inventors, discover the idea, steep themselves in it, and leave it to effect its outward form. Then come the second class, the imitators, who sedulously repeat this form, and alter it by exaggeration. Some nevertheless have talent, as Quarles, Herbert, Habington, Donne in particular, a pungent satirist, of terrible crudeness,[1] a powerful poet, of a precise and intense imagination, who still preserves something of the energy and thrill of the original inspiration.[2]

[1] See, in particular, his satire against courtiers. The following is against imitators.

> "But he is worst, who (beggarly) doth chaw
> Others wit's fruits, and in his ravenous maw
> Rankly digested, doth those things out-spew,
> As his owne things; and they 're his owne, 't is true,
> For if one eate my meate, though it be knowne
> The meat was mine, th' excrement is his owne."
>
> DONNE'S *Satires*, 1639. *Satire* ii. p. 123.

[2] "When I behold a stream, which from the spring
Doth with doubtful melodious murmuring,
Or in a speechless slumber calmly ride
Her wedded channel's bosom, and there chide

But he deliberately spoils all these gifts, and succeeds with great difficulty in concocting a piece of nonsense. For instance, the impassioned poets had said to their mistress, that if they lost her, they should hate all other women. Donne, in order to eclipse them, says:

> "O do not die, for I shall hate
> All women so, when thou art gone,
> That thee I shall not celebrate
> When I remember thou wast one."[1]

Twenty times while reading him we rub our brow, and ask with astonishment, how a man could have so tormented and contorted himself, strained his style, refined on his refinement, hit upon such absurd comparisons? But this was the spirit of the age; they made an effort to be ingeniously absurd. A flea had bitten Donne and his mistress, and he says:

> "This flea is you and I, and this
> Our mariage bed and mariage temple is.
> Though Parents grudge, and you, w' are met,
> And cloyster'd in these living walls of Jet.
> Though use make you apt to kill me,
> Let not to that selfe-murder added be,
> And sacrilege, three sins in killing three."[2]

> And bend her brows, and swell, if any bough
> Does but stoop down to kiss her utmost brow;
> Yet if her often gnawing kisses win
> The traiterous banks to gape and let her in,
> She rusheth violently and doth divorce
> Her from her native and her long kept-course,
> And roares, and braves it, and in gallant scorn
> In flatt'ring eddies promising return,
> She flouts her channel, which thenceforth is dry,
> Then say I: That is she, and this am I."—DONNE, *Elegy* vi.

[1] *Poems*, 1639: *A Feaver*, p. 15. [2] *Ibid. The Flea*, p. 1.

The Marquis de Mascarille[1] never found anything to equal this. Would you have believed a writer could invent such absurdities? She and he made but one, for both are but one with the flea, and so one could not be killed without the other." Observe that the wise Malherbe wrote very similar enormities, in the *Tears of St. Peter*, and that the sonneteers of Italy and Spain reach simultaneously the same height of folly, and you will agree that throughout Europe at that time they were at the close of a poetical epoch.

On this boundary line of a closing and a dawning literature a poet appeared, one of the most approved and illustrious of his time, Abraham Cowley,[2] a precocious child, a reader and a versifier like Pope, and who, like Pope, having known passions less than books, busied himself less about things than about words. Literary exhaustion has seldom been more manifest. He possesses all the capacity to say whatever pleases him, but he has precisely nothing to say. The substance has vanished, leaving in its place an empty form. In vain he tries the epic, the Pindaric strophe, all kinds of stanzas, odes, short lines, long lines; in vain he calls to his assistance botanical and philosophical similes, all the erudition of the university, all the recollections of antiquity, all the ideas of new science: we yawn as we read him. Except in a few descriptive verses, two or three graceful tendernesses,[3] he feels nothing, he speaks only; he is a poet of the brain. His collection of

[1] A valet in Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules*, who apes and exaggerates his master's manners and style, and pretends to be a marquess. He also appears in *L'Etourdi* and *Le dépit Amoureux*, by the same author.—TR.

[2] 1608-1667. I refer to the eleventh edition of 1710.

[3] *The Spring* (*The Mistress*, i. 72).

amorous pieces is but a vehicle for a scientific test, and serves to show that he has read the authors, that he knows geography, that he is well versed in anatomy, that he has a smattering of medicine and astronomy, that he has at his service comparisons and allusions enough to rack the brains of his readers. He will speak in this wise :

> " Beauty, thou active—passive Ill !
> Which dy'st thyself as fast as thou dost kill ! "

or will remark that his mistress is to blame for spending three hours every morning at her toilet, because

> " They make that Beauty Tyranny,
> That's else a Civil-government."

After reading two hundred pages, you feel disposed to box his ears. You have to think, by way of consolation, that every grand age must draw to a close, that this one could not do so otherwise, that the old glow of enthusiasm, the sudden flood of rapture, images, whimsical and audacious fancies, which once rolled through the minds of men, arrested now and cooled down, could only exhibit dross, a curdling scum, a multitude of brilliant and offensive points. You say to yourself that, after all, Cowley had perhaps talent; you find that he had in fact one, a new talent, unknown to the old masters, the sign of a new culture, which needs other manners, and announces a new society. Cowley had these manners, and belongs to this society. He was a well-governed, reasonable, well-informed, polished, well-educated man, who after twelve years of service and writing in France, under Queen Henrietta, retires at last wisely into the country, where he studies natural history, and prepares

a treatise on religion, philosophising on men and life, fertile in general reflections and ideas, a moralist, bidding his executor "to let nothing stand in his writings which might seem the least in the world to be an offence against religion or good manners." Such intentions and such a life produce and indicate less a poet, that is, a seer, a creator, than a literary man, I mean a man who can think and speak, and who therefore ought to have read much, learned much, written much, ought to possess a calm and clear mind, to be accustomed to polite society, sustained conversation, pleasantry. In fact, Cowley is an author by profession, the oldest of those, who in England deserve the name. His prose is as easy and sensible as his poetry is contorted and unreasonable. A polished man, writing for polished men, pretty much as he would speak to them in a drawing-room,—this I take to be the idea which they had of a good author in the seventeenth century. It is the idea which Cowley's Essays leave of his character; it is the kind of talent which the writers of the coming age take for their model; and he is the first of that grave and amiable group which, continued in Temple, reaches so far as to include Addison.

II.

Having reached this point, the Renaissance seemed to have attained its limit, and, like a drooping and faded flower, to be ready to leave its place for a new bud which began to spring up amongst its withered leaves. At all events, a living and unexpected shoot sprang from the old declining stock. At the moment when art languished, science shot forth; the whole labour of the age ended in this. The fruits are not unlike; on the con-

trary, they come from the same sap, and by the diversity of the shape only manifest two distinct periods of the inner growth which has produced them. Every art ends in a science, and all poetry in a philosophy. For science and philosophy do but translate into precise formulas the original conceptions which art and poetry render sensible by imaginary figures: when once the idea of an epoch is manifested in verse by ideal creations, it naturally comes to be expressed in prose by positive arguments. That which had struck men on escaping from ecclesiastical oppression and monkish asceticism was the pagan idea of a life true to nature, and freely developed. They had found nature buried behind scholasticism, and they had expressed it in poems and paintings; in Italy by superb healthy corporeality, in England by vehement and unconventional spirituality, with such divination of its laws, instincts, and forms, that we might extract from their theatre and their pictures a complete theory of soul and body. When enthusiasm is past, curiosity begins. The sentiment of beauty gives way to the need of truth. The theory contained in works of imagination frees itself. The gaze continues fixed on nature, not to admire now, but to understand. From painting we pass to anatomy, from the drama to moral philosophy, from grand poetical divinations to great scientific views; the second continue the first, and the same mind displays itself in both; for what art had represented, and science proceeds to observe, are living things, with their complex and complete structure, set in motion by their internal forces, with no supernatural intervention. Artists and savants, all set out, without knowing it themselves, from the same master conception, to wit, that nature subsists of

herself, that every existence has in its own womb the source of its action, that the causes of events are the innate laws of things; an all-powerful idea, from which was to issue the modern civilisation, and which, at the time I write of, produced in England and Italy, as before in Greece, genuine sciences, side by side with a complete art: after da Vinci and Michel Angelo, the school of anatomists, mathematicians, naturalists, ending with Galileo; after Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Shakspeare, the school of thinkers who surround Bacon and lead up to Harvey.

We have not far to look for this school. In the interregnum of Christianity the dominating bent of mind belongs to it. It was paganism which reigned in Elizabeth's court, not only in letters, but in doctrine, —a paganism of the north, always serious, generally sombre, but which was based, like that of the south, on natural forces. In some men all Christianity had passed away; many proceeded to atheism through excess of rebellion and debauchery, like Marlowe and Greene. With others, like Shakspeare, the idea of God scarcely makes its appearance; they see in our poor short human life only a dream, and beyond it the long sad sleep: for them, death is the goal of life; at most a dark gulf, into which man plunges, uncertain of the issue. If they carry their gaze beyond, they perceive,[1] not the spiritual soul welcomed into a purer world, but the corpse abandoned to the damp earth, or the ghost hovering about the churchyard. They speak like sceptics or superstitious men, never as true believers. Their heroes

[1] See in Shakspeare, *The Tempest, Measure for Measure, Hamlet:* in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv.; Webster, *passim*.

have human, not religious virtues; against crime they rely on honour and the love of the beautiful, not on piety and the fear of God. If others, at intervals, like Sidney and Spenser, catch a glimpse of the Divine, it is as a vague ideal light, a sublime Platonic phantom, which has no resemblance to a personal God, a strict inquisitor of the slightest motions of the heart. He appears at the summit of things, like the splendid crown of the world, but He does not weigh upon human life; He leaves it intact and free, only turning it towards the beautiful. Man does not know as yet the sort of narrow prison in which official cant and respectable creeds were, later on, to confine activity and intelligence. Even the believers, sincere Christians like Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne, discard all oppressive sternness, reduce Christianity to a sort of moral poetry, and allow naturalism to subsist beneath religion. In such a broad and open channel, speculation could spread its wings. With Lord Herbert appeared a systematic deism; with Milton and Algernon Sidney, a philosophical religion; Clarendon went so far as to compare Lord Falkland's gardens to the groves of Academe. Against the rigorism of the Puritans, Chillingworth, Hales, Hooker, the greatest doctors of the English Church, give a large place to natural reason,—so large, that never, even to this day, has it made such an advance.

An astonishing irruption of facts—the discovery of America, the revival of antiquity, the restoration of philology, the invention of the arts, the development of industries, the march of human curiosity over the whole of the past and the whole of the globe—came to furnish subject-matter, and prose began its reign. Sidney,

Wilson, Ascham, and Puttenham explored the rules of style; Hackluyt and Purchas compiled the cyclopædia of travel and the description of every land; Holinshed, Speed, Raleigh, Stowe, Knolles, Daniel, Thomas May, Lord Herbert, founded history; Camden, Spelman, Cotton, Usher, and Selden inaugurate scholarship; a legion of patient workers, of obscure collectors, of literary pioneers, amassed, arranged, and sifted the documents which Sir Robert Cotton and Sir Thomas Bodley stored up in their libraries; whilst utopians, moralists, painters of manners—Thomas More, Joseph Hall, John Earle, Owen Feltham, Burton—described and passed judgment on the modes of life, continued with Fuller, Sir Thomas Browne, and Isaac Walton up to the middle of the next century, and add to the number of controversialists and politicians who, with Hooker, Taylor, Chillingworth, Algernon Sidney, Harrington, study religion, society, church and state. A copious and confused fermentation, from which abundance of thoughts rose, but few notable books. Noble prose, such as was heard at the court of Louis XIV., in the house of Pollio, in the schools at Athens, such as rhetorical and sociable nations know how to produce, was altogether lacking. These men had not the spirit of analysis, the art of following step by step the natural order of ideas, nor the spirit of conversation, the talent never to weary or shock others. Their imagination is too little regulated, and their manners too little polished. They who had mixed most in the world, even Sidney, speak roughly what they think, and as they think it. Instead of glossing they exaggerate. They blurt out all, and withhold nothing. When they do not employ excessive compliments, they take to coarse jokes. They are ignorant of measured

liveliness, refined raillery, delicate flattery. They rejoice in gross puns, dirty allusions. They mistake involved charades and grotesque images for wit. Though they are great lords and ladies, they talk like ill-bred persons, lovers of buffoonery, of shows, and bear-fights. With some, as Overbury or Sir Thomas Browne, prose is so much run over by poetry, that it covers its narrative with images, and hides ideas under its pictures. They load their style with flowery comparisons, which produce one another, and mount one above another, so that sense disappears, and ornament only is visible. In short, they are generally pedants, still stiff with the rust of the school; they divide and subdivide, propound theses, definitions; they argue solidly and heavily, and quote their authors in Latin, and even in Greek; they square their massive periods, and learnedly knock their adversaries down, and their readers too, as a natural consequence. They are never on the prose-level, but always above or below—above by their poetic genius, below by the weight of their education and the barbarism of their manners. But they think seriously and for themselves; they are deliberate; they are convinced and touched by what they say. Even in the compiler we find a force and loyalty of spirit, which give confidence and cause pleasure. Their writings are like the powerful and heavy engravings of their contemporaries, the maps of Hofnagel for instance, so harsh and so instructive; their conception is sharp and clear; they have the gift of perceiving every object, not under a general aspect, like the classical writers, but specially and individually. It is not man in the abstract, the citizen as he is everywhere, the countryman as such, that they represent, but James or Thomas, Smith or Brown, of

such a parish, from such an office, with such and such attitude or dress, distinct from all others; in short, they see, not the idea, but the individual. Imagine the disturbance that such a disposition produces in a man's head, how the regular order of ideas becomes deranged by it; how every object, with the infinite medley of its forms, properties, appendages, will thenceforth fasten itself by a hundred points of contact unforeseen to other objects, and bring before the mind a series and a family; what boldness language will derive from it; what familiar, picturesque, absurd words, will break forth in succession; how the dash, the unforeseen, the originality and inequality of invention, will stand out. Imagine, at the same time, what a hold this form of mind has on objects, how many facts it condenses in each conception; what a mass of personal judgments, foreign authorities, suppositions, guesses, imaginations, it spreads over every subject; with what venturesome and creative fecundity it engenders both truth and conjecture. It is an extraordinary chaos of thoughts and forms, often abortive, still more often barbarous, sometimes grand. But from this superfluity something lasting and great is produced, namely science, and we have only to examine more closely into one or two of these works to see the new creation emerge from the blocks and the debris.

III.

Two writers especially display this state of mind. The first, Robert Burton, a clergyman and university recluse, who passed his life in libraries, and dabbled in all the sciences, as learned as Rabelais, having an inexhaustible and overflowing memory; unequal, more-

over, gifted with enthusiasm, and spasmodically gay, but as a rule sad and morose, to the extent of confessing in his epitaph that melancholy made up his life and his death; in the first place original, liking his own common sense, and one of the earliest models of that singular English mood which, withdrawing man within himself, develops in him, at one time imagination, at another scrupulosity, at another oddity, and makes of him, according to circumstances, a poet, an eccentric, a humorist, a madman, or a puritan. He read on for thirty years, put an encyclopædia into his head, and now, to amuse and relieve himself, takes a folio of blank paper. Twenty lines of a poet, a dozen lines of a treatise on agriculture, a folio page of heraldry, a description of rare fishes, a paragraph of a sermon on patience, the record of the fever fits of hypochondria, the history of the particle *that*, a scrap of metaphysics, —this is what passes through his brain in a quarter of an hour: it is a carnival of ideas and phrases, Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, philosophical, geometrical, medical, poetical, astrological, musical, pedagogic, heaped one on the other; an enormous medley, a prodigious mass of jumbled quotations, jostling thoughts, with the vivacity and the transport of a feast of unreason.

"This roving humour (though not with like success) I have ever had, and, like a ranging spaniel that barks at every bird he sees, leaving his game, I have followed all, saving that which I should, and may justly complain, and truly, *qui ubique est, nusquam est*, which Gesner did in modesty, that I have read many books, but to little purpose, for want of good method, I have confusedly tumbled over divers authors in our libraries with small profit, for want of art, order, memory, judgment. I

never travelled but in map or card, in which my unconfined thoughts have freely expatiated, as having ever been especially delighted with the study of cosmography. Saturn was lord of my geniture, culminating, etc., and Mars principal significator of manners, in partile conjunction with mine ascendent; both fortunate in their houses, etc. I am not poor, I am not rich; *nihil est, nihil deest;* I have little; I want nothing: all my treasure is in Minerva's tower. Greater preferment as I could never get, so am I not in debt for it. I have a competency (*laus Deo*) from my noble and munificent patrons. Though I live still a collegiat student, as Democritus in his garden, and lead a monastique life, *ipse mihi theatrum*, sequestred from those tumults and troubles of the world, *et tanquam in speculâ positus* (as he said), in some high place above you all, like *Stoïcus sapiens, omnia sæcula præterita præsentiaque videns, uno velut intuitu*, I hear and see what is done abroad, how others run, ride, turmoil, and macerate themselves in court and countrey. Far from these wrangling lawsuits, *aulæ vanitatem, fori ambitionem, ridere mecum soleo:* I laugh at all, only secure, lest my suit go amiss, my ships perish, corn and cattle miscarry, trade decay; I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for; a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene. I hear new news every day: and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions; of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, etc., daily musters and preparations, and such like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwracks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms—a vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances,—are daily brought to our ears: new books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues

of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion, etc. Now come tidings of weddings, maskings, mummeries, entertainments, jubilies, embassies, tilts and tournaments, trophies, triumphs, revels, sports, playes: then again, as in a new shifted scene, treasons, cheating tricks, robberies, enormous villanies in all kinds, funerals, burials, death of princes, new discoveries, expeditions; now comical, then tragical matters. To-day we hear of new lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred: one is let loose, another imprisoned: one purchaseth, another breaketh: he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty, then again dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps, etc. Thus I daily hear, and such like, both private and publick news." [1]

"For what a world of books offers itself, in all subjects, arts, and sciences, to the sweet content and capacity of the reader? In arithmetick, geometry, perspective, optick, astronomy, architecture, *sculptura*, *pictura*, of which so many and such elaborate treatises are of late written: in mechanicks and their mysteries, military matters, navigation, riding of horses, fencing, swimming, gardening, planting, great tomes of husbandry, cookery, faulconry, hunting, fishing, fowling, etc., with exquisite pictures of all sports, games, and what not. In musick, metaphysicks, natural and moral philosophy, philologie, in policy, heraldry, genealogy, chronology, etc., they afford great tomes, or those studies of antiquity, etc., *et quid subtilius arithmeticis inventionibus? quid jucundius musicis rationibus? quid divinius astronomicis? quid rectius geometricis demonstrationibus?* What so sure, what so pleasant? He that shall but see the geometrical tower of Garezenda at Bologne in Italy, the steeple and clock at Strasborough, will admire the effects of art, or that engine of Archimedes to remove the earth itself, if he had but a place to fasten

[1] *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 12th ed. 1821, 2 vols.: Democritus to the Reader, i. 4.

his instrument. *Archimedis cochlea*, and rare devises to corrivate waters, musick instruments, and trisyllable echoes again, again, and again repeated, with miriades of such. What vast tomes are extant in law, physick, and divinity, for profit, pleasure, practice, speculation, in verse or prose, etc.! Their names alone are the subject of whole volumes; we have thousands of authors of all sorts, many great libraries, full well furnished, like so many dishes of meat, served out for several palates, and he is a very block that is affected with none of them. Some take an infinite delight to study the very languages wherein these books are written—Hebrew, Greek, Syriack, Chalde, Arabick, etc. Methinks it would well please any man to look upon a geographical map (*suavi animum delectatione allicere, ob incredibilem rerum varietatem et jucunditatem, et ad pleniorem sui cognitionem excitare*), chorographical, topographical delineations; to behold, as it were, all the remote provinces, towns, cities of the world, and never to go forth of the limits of his study; to measure, by the scale and compasse, their extent, distance, examine their site. Charles the Great (as Platina writes) had three faire silver tables, in one of which superficies was a large map of Constantinople, in the second Rome neatly engraved, in the third an exquisite description of the whole world; and much delight he took in them. What greater pleasure can there now be, than to view those elaborate maps of Ortelius, Mercator, Hondius, etc.? to peruse those books of cities put out by Braunus and Hogenbergius? to read those exquisite descriptions of Maginus, Munster, Herrera, Laet, Merula, Boterus, Leander Albertus, Camden, Leo Afer, Adricomius, Nic. Gerbelius, etc.? those famous expeditions of Christopher Columbus, Americus Vespucius, Marcus Polus the Venetian, Lod. Vertomannus, Aloysius Cadamustus, etc.? those accurate diaries of Portugals, Hollanders, of Bartison, Oliver a Nort, etc., Hacluit's Voyages, Pet. Martyr's Decades, Benzo, Lerius, Linschoten's relations, those Hodæporicons of Jod. a Meggen, Brocarde the Monke, Bredenbachius, Jo. Dublinius, Sands, etc., to Jerusalem, Egypt,

and other remote places of the world? those pleasant itineraries of Paulus Hentzerus, Jodocus Sincerus, Dux Polonus, etc.? to read Bellonius observations, P. Gillius his survayes; those parts of America, set out, and curiously cut in pictures, by Fratres a Bry? To see a well cut herbal, hearbs, trees, flowers, plants, all vegetals, expressed in their proper colours to the life, as that of Matthiolus upon Dioscorides, Delacampius, Lobel, Bauhinus, and that last voluminous and mighty herbal of Besler of Noremberge; wherein almost every plant is to his own bignesse. To see birds, beasts, and fishes of the sea, spiders, gnats, serpents, flies, etc., all creatures set out by the same art, and truly expressed in lively colours, with an exact description of their natures, vertues, qualities, etc., as hath been accurately performed by Ælian, Gesner, Ulysses Aldrovandus, Bellonius, Rondoletius, Hippolytus Salvianus, etc." [1]

He is never-ending; words, phrases, overflow, are heaped up, overlap each other, and flow on, carrying the reader along, deafened, stunned, half-drowned, unable to touch ground in the deluge. Burton is inexhaustible. There are no ideas which he does not iterate under fifty forms: when he has exhausted his own, he pours out upon us other men's—the classics, the rarest authors, known only by savants—authors rarer still, known only to the learned; he borrows from all. Underneath these deep caverns of erudition and science, there is one blacker and more unknown than all the others, filled with forgotten authors, with crack-jaw names, Besler of Nuremberg, Adricomius, Linschoten, Brocarde, Bredenbachius. Amidst all these antediluvian monsters, bristling with Latin terminations, he is at his ease; he sports with them, laughs, skips from one to the other, drives them all abreast. He is like old

[1] *Anatomy of Melancholy*, i. part 2, sec. 2, Mem. 4, p. 420, *et passim*.

Proteus, the sturdy rover, who in one hour, with his team of hippopotami, makes the circuit of the ocean.

What subject does he take? Melancholy, his own individual mood; and he takes it like a schoolman. None of St. Thomas Aquinas' treatises is more regularly constructed than his. This torrent of erudition flows in geometrically planned channels, turning off at right angles without deviating by a line. At the head of every part you will find a synoptical and analytical table, with hyphens, brackets, each division begetting its subdivisions, each subdivision its sections, each section its subsections: of the malady in general, of melancholy in particular, of its nature, its seat, its varieties, causes, symptoms, prognosis; of its cure by permissible means, by forbidden means, by dietetic means, by pharmaceutical means. After the scholastic process, he descends from the general to the particular, and disposes each emotion and idea in its labelled case. In this framework, supplied by the middle-age, he heaps up the whole, like a man of the Renaissance,—the literary description of passions and the medical description of madness, details of the hospital with a satire on human follies, physiological treatises side by side with personal confidences, the recipes of the apothecary with moral counsels, remarks on love with the history of evacuations. The discrimination of ideas has not yet been effected; doctor and poet, man of letters and savant, he is all at once; for want of dams, ideas pour like different liquids into the same vat, with strange spluttering and bubbling, with an unsavoury smell and odd effect. But the vat is full, and from this admixture are produced potent compounds which no preceding age has known.

IV.

For in this mixture there is an effectual leaven, the poetic sentiment, which stirs up and animates the vast erudition, which will not be confined to dry catalogues; which, interpreting every fact, every object, disentangles or divines a mysterious soul within it, and agitates the whole mind of man, by representing to him the restless world within and without him as a grand enigma. Let us conceive a kindred mind to Shakspeare's, a scholar and an observer instead of an actor and a poet, who in place of creating is occupied in comprehending, but who, like Shakspeare, applies himself to living things, penetrates their internal structure, puts himself in communication with their actual laws, imprints in himself fervently and scrupulously the smallest details of their outward appearance; who at the same time extends his penetrating surmises beyond the region of observation, discerns behind visible phænomena some world obscure yet sublime, and trembles with a kind of veneration before the vast, indistinct, but peopled darkness on whose surface our little universe hangs quivering. Such a one is Sir Thomas Browne, a naturalist, a philosopher, a scholar, a physician, and a moralist, almost the last of the generation which produced Jeremy Taylor and Shakspeare. No thinker bears stronger witness to the wandering and inventive curiosity of the age. No writer has better displayed the brilliant and sombre imagination of the North. No one has spoken with a more eloquent emotion of death, the vast night of forgetfulness, of the all-devouring pit, of human vanity, which tries to create an ephemeral immortality out of glory or sculptured stones. No one has revealed, in

more glowing and original expressions, the poetic sap which flows through all the minds of the age.

"But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal duration; and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon. Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? Without the favour of the everlasting register, the first man had been as unknown as the last, and Methuselah's long life had been his only chronicle.

"Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century. The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox? Every hour adds unto the current arithmetick which scarce stands one moment. And since death must be the Lucina of life, and even Pagans could doubt, whether thus to live were to die; since our longest sun sets at right declensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darkness, and have our light in ashes; since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying mementos, and time, that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration;—diuturnity is a dream, and folly of expectation.

"Darkness and light divide the course of time, and oblivion shares with memory a great part even of our living beings; we slightly remember our felicities, and the smartest strokes of

affliction leave but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves. To weep into stones are fables. Afflictions induce callosities; miseries are slippery, or fall like snow upon us, which notwithstanding is no unhappy stupidity. To be ignorant of evils to come, and forgetful of evils past, is a merciful provision of nature, whereby we digest the mixture of our few and evil days; and our delivered senses not relapsing into cutting remembrances, our sorrows are not kept raw by the edge of repetitions. . . . All was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly. The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams. . . . Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave, solemnizing nativities and deaths with equal lustre, nor omitting ceremonies of bravery in the infancy of his nature . . . Pyramids, arches, obelisks, were but the irregularities of vain glory, and wild enormities of ancient magnanimity."[1]

These are almost the words of a poet, and it is just this poet's imagination which urges him onward into science.[2] Face to face with the productions of nature he abounds in conjectures, comparisons; he gropes about, proposing explanations, making trials, extending his guesses like so many flexible and vibrating feelers into the four corners of the globe, into the most distant regions of fancy and truth. As he looks upon the tree-like and foliaceous crusts which are formed upon the surface of freezing liquids, he asks himself if this be not a regeneration of vegetable essences, dissolved in the liquid. At the sight of curdling blood

[1] *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Wilkin, 1852, 3 vols. *Hydriotaphia*, iii. ch. v. 44, *et passim*.

[2] See Milsand, *Etude sur Sir Thomas Browne*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1858.

or milk, he inquires whether there be not something analogous to the formation of the bird in the egg, or to that coagulation of chaos which gave birth to our world. In presence of that impalpable force which makes liquids freeze, he asks if apoplexy and cataract are not the effects of a like power, and do not indicate also the presence of a congealing agency. He is in presence of nature as an artist, a man of letters in presence of a living countenance, marking every feature, every movement of physiognomy, so as to be able to divine the passions and the inner disposition, ceaselessly correcting and undoing his interpretations, kept in agitation by thought of the invisible forces which operate beneath the visible envelope. The whole of the middle-age and of antiquity, with their theories and imaginations, Platonism, Cabalism, Christian theology, Aristotle's substantial forms, the specific forms of the alchemists,—all human speculations, entangled and transformed one within the other, meet simultaneously in his brain, so as to open up to him vistas of this unknown world. The accumulation, the pile, the confusion, the fermentation and the inner swarming, mingled with vapours and flashes, the tumultuous overloading of his imagination and his mind, oppress and agitate him. In this expectation and emotion his curiosity takes hold of everything; in reference to the least fact, the most special, the most obsolete, the most chimerical, he conceives a chain of complicated investigations, calculating how the ark could contain all creatures, with their provision of food; how Perpenna, at a banquet, arranged the guests so as to strike Sertorius; what trees must have grown on the banks of Acheron, supposing that there were any; whether quincunx plantations had not

their origin in Eden, and whether the numbers and geometrical figures contained in the lozenge-form are not met with in all the productions of nature and art. You may recognise here the exuberance and the strange caprices of an inner development too ample and too strong. Archæology, chemistry, history, nature, there is nothing in which he is not passionately interested, which does not cause his memory and his inventive powers to overflow, which does not summon up within him the idea of some force, certainly admirable, possibly infinite. But what completes his picture, what signalises the advance of science, is the fact that his imagination provides a counterbalance against itself. He is as fertile in doubts as he is in explanations. If he sees a thousand reasons which tend to one view, he sees also a thousand which tend to the contrary. At the two extremities of the same fact, he raises up to the clouds, but in equal piles, the scaffolding of contradictory arguments. Having made a guess, he knows that it is but a guess; he pauses, ends with a perhaps, recommends verification. His writings consist only of opinions, given as such; even his principal work is a refutation of popular errors. In the main, he proposes questions, suggests explanations, suspends his judgments, nothing more; but this is enough: when the search is so eager, when the paths in which it proceeds are so numerous, when it is so scrupulous in securing its hold, the issue of the pursuit is sure; we are but a few steps from the truth.

V.

In this band of scholars, dreamers, and inquirers, appears the most comprehensive, sensible, originative of the

minds of the age, Francis Bacon, a great and luminous intellect, one of the finest of this poetic progeny, who, like his predecessors, was naturally disposed to clothe his ideas in the most splendid dress: in this age, a thought did not seem complete until it had assumed form and colour. But what distinguishes him from the others is, that with him an image only serves to concentrate meditation. He reflected long, stamped on his mind all the parts and relations of his subject; he is master of it, and then, instead of exposing this complete idea in a graduated chain of reasoning, he embodies it in a comparison so expressive, exact, lucid, that behind the figure we perceive all the details of the idea, like liquor in a fine crystal vase. Judge of his style by a single example:

"For as water, whether it be the dew of Heaven or the springs of the earth, easily scatters and loses itself in the ground, except it be collected into some receptacle, where it may by union and consort comfort and sustain itself (and for that cause, the industry of man has devised aqueducts, cisterns, and pools, and likewise beautified them with various ornaments of magnificence and state, as well as for use and necessity); so this excellent liquor of knowledge, whether it descend from divine inspiration or spring from human sense, would soon perish and vanish into oblivion, if it were not preserved in books, traditions, conferences, and especially in places appointed for such matters as universities, colleges, and schools, where it may have both a fixed habitation, and means and opportunity of increasing and collecting itself."[1]

"The greatest error of all the rest, is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or farthest end of knowledge: for men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to

[1] Bacon's *Works*. Translation of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. Book ii.; To the King.

entertain their minds with variety and delight; sometimes for ornament and reputation; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction; and most times for lucre and profession; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men: as if there were sought in knowledge a couch whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit; or a terrace, for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state, for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a fort or commanding ground, for strife and contention; or a shop, for profit or sale; and not a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate."[1]

This is his mode of thought, by symbols, not by analysis; instead of explaining his idea, he transposes and translates it,—translates it entire, to the smallest details, enclosing all in the majesty of a grand period, or in the brevity of a striking sentence. Thence springs a style of admirable richness, gravity, and vigour, now solemn and symmetrical, now concise and piercing, always elaborate and full of colour.[2] There is nothing in English prose superior to his diction.

Thence is derived also his manner of conceiving things. He is not a dialectician, like Hobbes or Descartes, apt in arranging ideas, in educing one from another, in leading his reader from the simple to the complex by an unbroken chain. He is a producer of conceptions and of sentences. The matter being explored, he says to us: "Such it is; touch it not on that side; it must be approached from the other." Nothing more; no proof, no effort to convince: he affirms, and does nothing more;

[1] Bacon's *Works*. Translation of the *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Book i. The true end of learning mistaken.

[2] Especially in the *Essays*.

he has thought in the manner of artists and poets, and he speaks after the manner of prophets and seers. *Cogitata et visa* this title of one of his books might be the title of all. The most admirable, the *Novum Organum*, is a string of aphorisms,—a collection, as it were, of scientific decrees, as of an oracle who foresees the future and reveals the truth. And to make the resemblance complete, he expresses them by poetical figures, by enigmatic abbreviations, almost in Sibylline verses: *Idola specûs, Idola tribûs, Idola fori, Idola theatri*, every one will recall these strange names, by which he signifies the four kinds of illusions to which man is subject.[1] Shakspeare and the seers do not contain more vigorous or expressive condensations of thought, more resembling inspiration, and in Bacon they are to be found everywhere. On the whole, his process is that of the creators; it is intuition, not reasoning. When he has laid up his store of facts, the greatest possible, on some vast subject, on some entire province of the mind, on the whole anterior philosophy, on the general condition of the sciences, on the power and limits of human reason, he casts over all this a comprehensive view, as it were a great net, brings up a universal idea, condenses his idea into a maxim, and hands it to us with the words, "Verify and profit by it."

There is nothing more hazardous, more like fantasy, than this mode of thought, when it is not checked by natural and strong good sense. This common sense, which is a kind of natural divination, the stable equilibrium of an intellect always gravitating to the true,

[1] See also *Novum Organum*, Books i. and ii.; the twenty-seven kinds of examples, with their metaphorical names: *Instantiæ crucis, divortii januæ, Instantiæ innuentes, polychrestæ, magicæ*, etc.

like the needle to the pole, Bacon possesses in the highest degree. He has a pre-eminently practical, even an utilitarian mind, such as we meet with later in Bentham, and such as their business habits were to impress more and more upon the English. At the age of sixteen, while at the university, he was dissatisfied with Aristotle's philosophy,[1] not that he thought meanly of the author, whom, on the contrary, he calls a great genius; but because it seemed to him of no practical utility, incapable of producing works which might promote the well-being of men. We see that from the outset he struck upon his dominant idea: all else comes to him from this; a contempt for antecedent philosophy, the conception of a different system, the entire reformation of the sciences by the indication of a new goal, the definition of a distinct method, the opening up of unsuspected anticipations.[2] It is never speculation which he relishes, but the practical application of it. His eyes are turned not to heaven, but to earth, not to things abstract and vain, but to things palpable and solid, not to curious but to profitable truths. He seeks to better the condition of men, to labour for the welfare of mankind, to enrich human life with new discoveries and new resources, to equip mankind with new powers and new instruments of action. His philosophy itself is but an instrument, *organum*, a sort of machine or lever constructed to enable the intellect to raise a weight, to break through obstacles, to open up vistas, to accomplish tasks which had hitherto surpassed its power.

[1] *The Works of Francis Bacon*, London 1824, vol. vii. p. 2. *Latin Biography* by Rawley.

[2] This point is brought out by the review of Lord Macaulay *Critical and Historical Essays*, vol. iii.

In his eyes, every special science, like science in general, should be an implement. He invites mathematicians, to quit their pure geometry, to study numbers only with a view to natural philosophy, to seek formulas only to calculate real quantities and natural motions. He recommends moralists to study the soul, the passions, habits, temptations, not merely in a speculative way, but with a view to the cure or diminution of vice, and assigns to the science of morals as its goal the amelioration of morals. For him, the object of science is always the establishment of an art, that is, the production of something of practical utility; when he wished to describe the efficacious nature of his philosophy by a tale, he delineated in the *New Atlantis*, with a poet's boldness and the precision of a seer, almost employing the very terms in use now, modern applications, and the present organisation of the sciences, academies, observatories, air-balloons, submarine vessels, the improvement of land, the transmutation of species, regenerations, the discovery of remedies, the preservation of food. The end of our foundation, says his principal personage, is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible. And this "possible" is infinite.

How did this grand and just conception originate? Doubtless common sense and genius too were necessary to its production; but neither common sense nor genius was lacking to men: there had been more than one who, observing, like Bacon, the progress of particular industries, could, like him, have conceived of universal industry, and from certain limited ameliorations have advanced to unlimited amelioration. Here we see the

power of connection; men think they do everything by their individual thought, and they can do nothing without the assistance of the thoughts of their neighbours; they fancy that they are following the small voice within them, but they only hear it because it is swelled by the thousand buzzing and imperious voices, which, issuing from all surrounding or distant circumstances, are confounded with it in an harmonious vibration. Generally they hear it, as Bacon did, from the first moment of reflection; but it had become inaudible among the opposing sounds which came from without to smother it. Could this confidence in the infinite enlargement of human power, this glorious idea of the universal conquest of nature, this firm hope in the continual increase of well-being and happiness, have germinated, grown, occupied an intelligence entirely, and thence have struck its roots, been propagated and spread over neighbouring intelligences, in a time of discouragement and decay, when men believed the end of the world at hand, when things were falling into ruin about them, when Christian mysticism, as in the first centuries, ecclesiastical tyranny, as in the fourteenth century, were convincing them of their impotence, by perverting their intellectual efforts and curtailing their liberty. On the contrary, such hopes must then have seemed to be outbursts of pride, or suggestions of the carnal mind. They did seem so; and the last representatives of ancient science, and the first of the new, were exiled or imprisoned, assassinated or burned. In order to be developed an idea must be in harmony with surrounding civilisation; before man can expect to attain the dominion over nature, or attempts to improve his condition, amelioration must have begun on all sides, industries

have increased, knowledge have been accumulated, the arts expanded, a hundred thousand irrefutable witnesses must have come incessantly to give proof of his power and assurance of his progress. The "masculine birth of the time" (*temporis partus masculus*) is the title which Bacon applies to his work, and it is a true one. In fact, the whole age co-operated in it; by this creation it was finished. The consciousness of human power and prosperity gave to the Renaissance its first energy, its ideal, its poetic materials, its distinguishing features; and now it furnishes it with its final expression, its scientific doctrine, and its ultimate object.

We may add also, its method. For, the end of a journey once determined, the route is laid down, since the end always determines the route; when the point to be reached is changed, the path of approach is changed, and science, varying its object, varies also its method. So long as it limited its effort to the satisfying an idle curiosity, opening out speculative vistas, establishing a sort of opera in speculative minds, it could launch out any moment into metaphysical abstractions and distinctions: it was enough for it to skim over experience; it soon quitted it, and came all at once upon great words, quiddities, the principle of individuation, final causes. Half proofs sufficed science; at bottom it did not care to establish a truth, but to get an opinion; and its instrument, the syllogism, was serviceable only for refutations, not for discoveries: it took general laws for a starting-point instead of a point of arrival; instead of going to find them, it fancied them found. The syllogism was good in the schools, not in nature; it made disputants, not discoverers. From the moment that science had art for an end, and men studied in

order to act, all was transformed; for we cannot act, without certain and precise knowledge. Forces, before they can be employed, must be measured and verified; before we can build a house, we must know exactly the resistance of the beams, or the house will collapse; before we can cure a sick man, we must know with certainty the effect of a remedy, or the patient will die. Practice makes certainty and exactitude a necessity to science, because practice is impossible when it has nothing to lean upon but guesses and approximations. How can we eliminate guesses and approximations? How introduce into science solidity and precision? We must imitate the cases in which science, issuing in practice, has proved to be precise and certain, and these cases are the industries. We must, as in the industries, observe, essay, grope about, verify, keep our mind fixed on sensible and particular things, advance to general rules only step by step; not anticipate experience, but follow it; not imagine nature, but interpret it. For every general effect, such as heat, whiteness, hardness, liquidity, we must seek a general condition, so that in producing the condition we may produce the effect. And for this it is necessary, by fit rejections and exclusions, to extract the condition sought from the heap of facts in which it lies buried, construct the table of cases from which the effect is absent, the table where it is present, the table where the effect is shown in various degrees, so as to isolate and bring to light the condition which produced it.[1] Then we shall have, not useless universal axioms, but efficacious mediate axioms, true laws from which we can derive works, and which are the sources of power in the same degree as the sources

[1] *Novum Organum*, ii. 15 and 16.

of light.[1] Bacon described and predicted in this modern science and industry, their correspondence, method, resources, principle; and after more than two centuries, it is still to him that we go even at the present day to look for the theory of what we are attempting and doing.

Beyond this great view, he has discovered nothing. Cowley, one of his admirers, rightly said that, like Moses on Mount Pisgah, he was the first to announce the promised land; but he might have added quite as justly, that, like Moses, he did not enter there. He pointed out the route, but did not travel it; he taught men how to discover natural laws, but discovered none. His definition of heat is extremely imperfect. His *Natural History* is full of fanciful explanations.[2] Like the poets, he peoples nature with instincts and desires; attributes to bodies an actual voracity, to the atmosphere a thirst for light, sounds, odours, vapours, which it drinks in; to metals a sort of haste to be incorporated with acids. He explains the duration of the bubbles of air which float on the surface of liquids, by supposing that air has a very small or no appetite for height. He sees in every quality, weight, ductility, hardness, a distinct essence which has its special cause; so that when a man knows the cause of every quality of gold, he will be able to put all these causes together, and make gold. In the main, with the alchemists, Paracelsus and Gilbert, Kepler himself, with all the men of his time, men of imagination, nourished on Aristotle, he represents nature as a compound of secret and living energies, inexplicable and primordial forces, distinct and indecom-

[1] *Novum Organum*, i. i. 3.

[2] *Natural History*, 800, 24, etc. *De Augmentis*, iii. 1.

posable essences, adapted each by the will of the Creator to produce a distinct effect. He almost saw souls endowed with latent repugnances and occult inclinations, which aspire to or resist certain directions, certain mixtures, and certain localities. On this account also he confounds everything in his researches in an undistinguishable mass, vegetative and medicinal properties, mechanical and curative, physical and moral, without considering the most complex as depending on the simplest, but each on the contrary in itself, and taken apart, as an irreducible and independent existence. Obstinate in this error, the thinkers of the age mark time without advancing. They see clearly with Bacon the wide field of discovery, but they cannot enter upon it. They want an idea, and for want of this idea they do not advance. The disposition of mind which but now was a lever, is become an obstacle: it must be changed, that the obstacle may be got rid of. For ideas, I mean great and efficacious ones, do not come at will nor by chance, by the effort of an individual, or by a happy accident. Methods and philosophies, as well as literatures and religions, arise from the spirit of the age; and this spirit of the age makes them potent or powerless. One state of public intelligence excludes a certain kind of literature; another, a certain scientific conception. When it happens thus, writers and thinkers labour in vain, the literature is abortive, the conception does not make its appearance. In vain they turn one way and another, trying to remove the weight which hinders them; something stronger than themselves paralyses their hands and frustrates their endeavours. The central pivot of the vast wheel on which human affairs move must be displaced one notch, that all may

move with its motion. At this moment the pivot was moved, and thus a revolution of the great wheel begins, bringing round a new conception of nature, and in consequence that part of the method which was lacking. To the diviners, the creators, the comprehensive and impassioned minds who seized objects in a lump and in masses, succeeded the discursive thinkers, the systematic thinkers, the graduated and clear logicians, who, disposing ideas in continuous series, lead the hearer gradually from the simple to the most complex by easy and unbroken paths. Descartes superseded Bacon; the classical age obliterated the Renaissance; poetry and lofty imagination gave way before rhetoric, eloquence, and analysis. In this transformation of mind, ideas were transformed. Everything was drained dry and simplified. The universe, like all else, was reduced to two or three notions; and the conception of nature, which was poetical, became mechanical. Instead of souls, living forces, repugnances, and attractions, we have pulleys, levers, impelling forces. The world, which seemed a mass of instinctive powers, is now like a mere machinery of cog-wheels. Beneath this adventurous supposition lies a large and certain truth: that there is, namely, a scale of facts, some at the summit very complex, others at the base very simple; those above having their origin in those below, so that the lower ones explain the higher; and that we must seek the primary laws of things in the laws of motion. The search was made, and Galileo found them. Thenceforth the work of the Renaissance, outstripping the extreme point to which Bacon had pushed it, and at which he had left it, was able to proceed onward by itself, and did so proceed, without limit.

CHAPTER II.

The Theatre.

We must look at this world more closely, and beneath the ideas which are developed seek for the living men; it is the theatre especially which is the original product of the English Renaissance, and it is the theatre especially which will exhibit the men of the English Renaissance. Forty poets, amongst them ten of superior rank, as well as one, the greatest of all artists who have represented the soul in words; many hundreds of pieces, and nearly fifty masterpieces; the drama extended over all the provinces of history, imagination, and fancy,—expanded so as to embrace comedy, tragedy, pastoral and fanciful literature—to represent all degrees of human condition, and all the caprices of human invention — to express all the perceptible details of actual truth, and all the philosophic grandeur of general reflection; the stage disencumbered of all precept and freed from all imitation, given up and appropriated in the minutest particulars to the reigning taste and public intelligence: all this was a vast and manifold work, capable by its flexibility, its greatness, and its form, of receiving and preserving the exact imprint of the age and of the nation.[1]

[1] "The very age and body of the time, his form and pressure."—*Shakspeare.*

I.

Let us try, then, to set before our eyes this public, this audience, and this stage—all connected with one another, as in every natural and living work; and if ever there was a living and natural work, it is here. There were already seven theatres in London, in Shakspeare's time, so brisk and universal was the taste for dramatic representations. Great and rude contrivances, awkward in their construction, barbarous in their appointments; but a fervid imagination readily supplied all that they lacked, and hardy bodies endured all inconveniences without difficulty. On a dirty site, on the banks of the Thames, rose the principal theatre, the Globe, a sort of hexagonal tower, surrounded by a muddy ditch, on which was hoisted a red flag. The common people could enter as well as the rich: there were sixpenny, twopenny, even penny seats; but they could not see it without money. If it rained, and it often rains in London, the people in the pit, butchers, mercers, bakers, sailors, apprentices, receive the streaming rain upon their heads. I suppose they did not trouble themselves about it; it was not so long since they began to pave the streets of London; and when men, like these, have had experience of sewers and puddles, they are not afraid of catching cold. While waiting for the piece, they amuse themselves after their fashion, drink beer, crack nuts, eat fruit, howl, and now and then resort to their fists; they have been known to fall upon the actors, and turn the theatre upside down. At other times they were dissatisfied and went to the tavern to give the poet a hiding, or toss him in a blanket; they were coarse fellows, and there was no month

when the cry of "Clubs" did not call them out of their shops to exercise their brawny arms. When the beer took effect, there was a great upturned barrel in the pit, a peculiar receptacle for general use. The smell rises, and then comes the cry, "Burn the juniper!" They burn some in a plate on the stage, and the heavy smoke fills the air. Certainly the folk there assembled could scarcely get disgusted at anything, and cannot have had sensitive noses. In the time of Rabelais there was not much cleanliness to speak of. Remember that they were hardly out of the middle-age, and that in the middle-age man lived on a dunghill.

Above them, on the stage, were the spectators able to pay a shilling, the elegant people, the gentlefolk. These were sheltered from the rain, and if they chose to pay an extra shilling, could have a stool. To this were reduced the prerogatives of rank and the devices of comfort: it often happened that there were not stools enough; then they lie down on the ground: this was not a time to be dainty. They play cards, smoke, insult the pit, who gave it them back without stinting, and throw apples at them into the bargain. They also gesticulate, swear in Italian, French, English;[1] crack aloud jokes in dainty, composite, high-coloured, words: in short, they have the energetic, original, gay manners of artists, the same humour, the same absence of constraint, and, to complete the resemblance, the same desire to make themselves singular, the same imaginative cravings, the same absurd and picturesque devices, beards cut to a point, into the shape of a fan, a spade, the letter T, gaudy and expensive dresses, copied from five or six neighbouring nations, embroidered, laced

[1] Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour; Cynthia's Revels.*

with gold, motley, continually heightened in effect, or changed for others: there was, as it were, a carnival in their brains as well as on their backs.

With such spectators illusions could be produced without much trouble: there were no preparations or perspectives; few or no moveable scenes: their imaginations took all this upon them. A scroll in big letters announced to the public that they were in London or Constantinople; and that was enough to carry the public to the desired place. There was no trouble about probability. Sir Philip Sidney writes:

"You shall have Asia of the one side, and Africke of the other, and so many other under-kingdomes, that the Plaier when hee comes in, must ever begin with telling where hee is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then wee must beleeve the stage to be a garden. By and by wee heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a rocke; . . . while in the meane time two armies flie in, represented with foure swordes and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? Now of time they are much more liberall. For ordinary it is, that two young Princes fall in love, after many traverses, shee is got with childe, delivered of a faire boy, hee is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is readie to get another childe; and all this in two houres space."[1]

Doubtless these enormities were somewhat reduced under Shakspeare; with a few hangings, crude representations of animals, towers, forests, they assisted somewhat the public imagination. But after all, in Shakspeare's plays as in all others, the imagination from within is chiefly drawn upon for the machinery;

[1] *The Defence of Poesie*, ed. 1629, p. 562.

it must lend itself to all, substitute all, accept for a queen a young man who has just been shaved, endure in one act ten changes of place, leap suddenly over twenty years or five hundred miles,[1] take half-a dozen supernumeraries for forty thousand men, and to have represented by the rolling of the drums all the battles of Cæsar, Henry V., Coriolanus, Richard III. And imagination, being so overflowing and so young, accepts all this! Recall your own youth; for my part, the deepest emotions I have ever felt at a theatre were given to me by a strolling bevy of four young girls, playing comedy and tragedy on a stage in a coffeehouse; true, I was eleven years old. So in this theatre, at this moment, their souls were fresh, as ready to feel everything as the poet was to dare everything.

II.

These are but externals; let us try to advance further, to observe the passions, the bent of mind, the inner man: it is this inner state which raised and modelled the drama, as everything else; invisible inclinations are everywhere the cause of visible works, and the interior shapes the exterior. What are these townspeople, courtiers, this public, whose taste fashions the theatre? what is there peculiar in the structure and condition of their minds? The condition must needs be peculiar; for the drama flourishes all of a sudden, and for sixty years together, with marvellous luxuriance, and at the end of this time is arrested so that no effort could ever revive it. The structure must be peculiar; for of all theatres, old and new, this is distinct in form, and displays a style, action, characters, an idea of life, which are not found in any age or any country beside.

[1] *Winter's Tale; Cymbeline; Julius Cæsar.*

This particular feature is the free and complete expansion of nature.

What we call nature in men is, man such as he was before culture and civilisation had deformed and reformed him. Almost always, when a new generation arrives at manhood and consciousness, it finds a code of precepts impose on it with all the weight and authority of antiquity. A hundred kinds of chains, a hundred thousand kinds of ties, religion, morality, good breeding, every legislation which regulates sentiments, morals, manners, fetter and tame the creature of impulse and passion which breathes and frets within each of us. There is nothing like that here. It is a regeneration, and the curb of the past is wanting to the present. Catholicism, reduced to external ceremony and clerical chicanery, had just ended; Protestantism, arrested in its first gropings after truth, or straying into sects, had not yet gained the mastery; the religion of discipline was grown feeble, and the religion of morals was not yet established; men ceased to listen to the directions of the clergy, and had not yet spelt out the law of conscience. The church was turned into an assembly-room, as in Italy; the young fellows came to St. Paul's to walk, laugh, chatter, display their new cloaks; the thing had even passed into a custom. They paid for the noise they made with their spurs, and this tax was a source of income to the canons;[1] pickpockets, loose

[1] Strype, in his *Annals of the Reformation* (1571), says: "Many now were wholly departed from the communion of the church, and came no more to hear divine service in their parish churches, nor received the holy sacrament, according to the laws of the realm." Richard Baxter, in his *Life*, published in 1696, says: "We lived in a country that had but little preaching at all. . . . In the village where I lived the Reader read the Common Prayer briefly; and the

girls, came there by crowds; these latter struck their bargains while service was going on. Imagine, in short, that the scruples of conscience and the severity of the Puritans were at that time odious and ridiculed on the stage, and judge of the difference between this sensual, unbridled England, and the correct, disciplined, stiff England of our own time. Ecclesiastical or secular, we find no signs of rule. In the failure of faith, reason had not gained sway, and opinion is as void of authority as tradition. The imbecile age, which has just ended, continues buried in scorn, with its ravings, its verse-makers, and its pedantic text-books; and out of the liberal opinions derived from antiquity, from Italy, France, and Spain, every one could pick and choose as it pleased him, without stooping to restraint or acknowledging a superiority. There was no model imposed on them, as nowadays; instead of affecting imitation, they affected originality.[1] Each strove to be himself, with his own oaths, peculiar ways, costumes, his specialties of conduct and humour, and to be unlike every one else. They said not, "So and so is done," but "I do so and so." Instead of restraining they gave free vent to themselves. There was no etiquette of society; save for an exaggerated jargon of chivalresque courtesy, they are masters of speech and action on the impulse of the moment. You will find them free from decorum, as of all else.

rest of the day, even till dark night almost, except Eating time, was spent in Dancing under a Maypole and a great tree, not far from my father's door, where all the Town did meet together. And though one of my father's own Tenants was the piper, he could not restrain him nor break the sport. So that we could not read the Scripture in our family without the great disturbance of the Taber and Pipe and noise in the street."

[1] Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*.

In this outbreak and absence of fetters, they resemble fine strong horses let loose in the meadow. Their inborn instincts have not been tamed, nor muzzled, nor diminished.

On the contrary, they have been preserved intact by bodily and military training; and escaping as they were from barbarism, not from civilisation, they had not been acted upon by the innate softening and hereditary tempering which are now transmitted with the blood, and civilise a man from the moment of his birth. This is why man, who for three centuries has been a domestic animal, was still almost a savage beast, and the force of his muscles and the strength of his nerves increased the boldness and energy of his passions. Look at these uncultivated men, men of the people, how suddenly the blood warms and rises to their face; their fists double, their lips press together, and those vigorous bodies rush at once into action. The courtiers of that age were like our men of the people. They had the same taste for the exercise of their limbs, the same indifference toward the inclemencies of the weather, the same coarseness of language, the same undisguised sensuality. They were carmen in body and gentlemen in sentiment, with the dress of actors and the tastes of artists. "At fourtene," says John Hardyng, "a lordes sonnes shalle to felde hunte the dere, and catch an hardynesse. For dere to hunte and slea, and see them blede, ane hardyment gyffith to his courage. . . . At sextene yere, to werray and to wage, to juste and ryde, and castels to assayle . . . and every day his armure to assay in fete of armes with some of his meyne."[1]

[1] *The Chronicle* of John Hardyng (1436), ed. H. Ellis, 1812. Preface.

When ripened to manhood, he is employed with the bow, in wrestling, leaping, vaulting. Henry VIII.'s court, in its noisy merriment, was like a village fair. The king, says Holinshed, exercised himself "dailie in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling, casting of the barre, plaieing at the recorders, flute, virginals, in setting of songs, and making of ballads." He leaps the moats with a pole, and was once within an ace of being killed. He is so fond of wrestling, that publicly, on the field of the Cloth of Gold, he seized Francis I. in his arms to try a throw with him. This is how a common soldier or a bricklayer nowadays tries a new comrade. In fact, they regarded gross jests and brutal buffooneries as amusements, as soldiers and bricklayers do now. In every nobleman's house there was a fool, whose business it was to utter pointed jests, to make eccentric gestures, horrible faces, to sing licentious songs, as we might hear now in a beer-house. They thought insults and obscenity a joke. They were foul-mouthed, they listened to Rabelais' words undiluted, and delighted in conversation which would revolt us. They had no respect for humanity; the rules of proprieties and the habits of good breeding began only under Louis XIV., and by imitation of the French; at this time they all blurted out the word that fitted in, and that was most frequently a coarse word. You will see on the stage, in Shakspeare's *Pericles*, the filth of a haunt of vice.[1] The great lords, the well-dressed ladies, speak Billingsgate. When Henry V. pays his court to Catherine of France, it is with the coarse bearing of a sailor who may have taken a fancy to a sutler; and like the tars who tattoo a

[1] Act iv. 2 and 4. See also the character of Calypso in Massinger; Putana in Ford; Protalyce in Beaumont and Fletcher.

heart on their arms to prove their love for the girls they left behind them, there were men who "devoured sulphur and drank urine"[1] to win their mistress by a proof of affection. Humanity is as much lacking as decency.[2] Blood, suffering, does not move them. The court frequents bear and bull baitings, where dogs are ripped up and chained beasts are sometimes beaten to death, and it was, says an officer of the palace, "a charming entertainment."[3] No wonder they used their arms like clodhoppers and gossips. Elizabeth used to beat her maids of honour, "so that these beautiful girls could often be heard crying and lamenting in a piteous manner." One day she spat upon Sir Mathew's fringed coat; at another time, when Essex, whom she was scolding, turned his back, she gave him a box on the ear. It was then the practice of great ladies to beat their children and their servants. Poor Jane Grey was sometimes so wretchedly "boxed, struck, pinched, and

[1] Middleton, *Dutch Courtezan.*

[2] Commission given by Henry VIII. to the Earl of Hertford, 1544: "You are there to put all to fire and sword; to burn Edinburgh town, and to raze and deface it, when you have sacked it, and gotten what you can out of it. . . . Do what you can out of hand, and without long tarrying, to beat down and overthrow the castle, sack Holyrood-House, and as many towns and villages about Edinburgh as ye conveniently can; sack Leith, and burn and subvert it, and all the rest, putting man, woman, and child to fire and sword, without exception, when any resistance shall be made against you; and this done, pass over to the Fife land, and extend like extremities and destructions in all towns and villages whereunto ye may reach conveniently, not forgetting amongst all the rest, so to spoil and turn upside down the cardinal's town of St. Andrew's, as the upper stone may be the nether, and not one stick stand by another, sparing no creature alive within the same, specially such as either in friendship or blood be allied to the cardinal. This journey shall succeed most to his majesty's honour."

[3] Laneham, *A Goodly Relief.*

ill-treated in other manners which she dare not relate," that she used to wish herself dead. Their first idea is to come to words, to blows, to have satisfaction. As in feudal times, they appeal at once to arms, and retain the habit of taking the law in their own hands, and without delay. "On Thursday laste," writes Gilbert Talbot to the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, "as my Lorde Rytche was rydynge in the streates, there was one Wyndam that stode in a dore, and shotte a dagge at him, thynkynge to have slayne him. . . . The same daye, also, as Sr John Conway was goynge in the streetes, M^r. Lodovyke Grevell came sodenly upon him, and stroke him on the hedd w^th a sworde. . . . I am forced to trouble yo^r Honors w^th thes tryflynge matters, for I know no greater."[1] No one, not even the queen, is safe among these violent dispositions.[2] Again, when one man struck another in the precincts of the court, his hand was cut off, and the arteries stopped with a red-hot iron. Only such atrocious imitations of their own crimes, and the painful image of bleeding and suffering flesh, could tame their vehemence and restrain the uprising of their instincts. Judge now what materials they furnish to the theatre, and what characters they look for at the theatre. To please the public, the stage cannot deal too much in open lust and the strongest passions; it must depict man attaining the limit of his desires, unchecked, almost mad, now trembling and rooted before the white palpitating flesh which his eyes devour, now haggard and grinding his teeth before the

[1] 13th February 1587. Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times*, ii. p. 165. See also the same work for all these details.

[2] Essex, when struck by the queen, put his hand on the hilt of his sword.

enemy whom he wishes to tear to pieces, now carried beyond himself and overwhelmed at the sight of the honours and wealth which he covets, always raging and enveloped in a tempest of eddying ideas, sometimes shaken by impetuous joy, more often on the verge of fury and madness, stronger, more ardent, more daringly let loose to infringe on reason and law than ever. We hear from the stage as from the history of the time, these fierce murmurs: the sixteenth century is like a den of lions.

Amid passions so strong as these there is not one lacking. Nature appears here in all its violence, but also in all its fulness. If nothing had been weakened, nothing had been mutilated. It is the entire man who is displayed, heart, mind, body, senses, with his noblest and finest aspirations, as with his most bestial and savage appetites, without the preponderance of any dominant circumstance to cast him altogether in one direction, to exalt or degrade him. He has not become rigid, as he will be under Puritanism. He is not uncrowned as in the Restoration. After the hollowness and weariness of the fifteenth century, he rose up by a second birth, as before in Greece man had risen by a first birth; and now, as then, the temptations of the outer world came combined to raise his faculties from their sloth and torpor. A sort of generous warmth spread over them to ripen and make them flourish. Peace, prosperity, comfort began; new industries and increasing activity suddenly multiplied objects of utility and luxury tenfold. America and India, by their discovery, caused the treasures and prodigies heaped up afar over distant seas to shine before their eyes; antiquity re-discovered, sciences mapped out, the Reformation begun, books

multiplied by printing, ideas by books, doubled the means of enjoyment, imagination, and thought. People wanted to enjoy, to imagine, and to think; for the desire grows with the attraction, and here all attractions were combined. There were attractions for the senses, in the chambers which they began to warm, in the beds newly furnished with pillows, in the coaches which they began to use for the first time. There were attractions for the imagination in the new palaces, arranged after the Italian manner; in the variegated hangings from Flanders; in the rich garments, gold-embroidered, which, being continually changed, combined the fancies and the splendours of all Europe. There were attractions for the mind, in the noble and beautiful writings which, spread abroad, translated, explained, brought in philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, from restored antiquity, and from the surrounding Renaissances. Under this appeal all aptitudes and instincts at once started up; the low and the lofty, ideal and sensual love, gross cupidity and pure generosity. Recall what you yourself experienced, when from being a child you became a man: what wishes for happiness, what breadth of anticipation, what intoxication of heart wafted you towards all joys; with what impulse your hands seized involuntarily and all at once every branch of the tree, and would not let a single fruit escape. At sixteen years, like Chérubin,[1] we wish for a servant girl while we adore a Madonna; we are capable of every species of covetousness, and also of every species of self-denial; we find virtue more lovely, our meals more enjoyable; pleasure has more zest, heroism more worth; there is no allurement which is not keen; the sweet-

[1] A page in the *Mariage de Figaro*, a comedy by Beaumarchais.—TR.

ness and novelty of things are too strong; and in the hive of passions which buzzes within us, and stings us like the sting of a bee, we can do nothing but plunge, one after another, in all directions. Such were the men of this time, Raleigh, Essex, Elizabeth, Henry VIII. himself, excessive and inconstant, ready for devotion and for crime, violent in good and evil, heroic with strange weaknesses, humble with sudden changes of mood, never vile with premeditation like the roysterers of the Restoration, never rigid on principle like the Puritans of the Revolution, capable of weeping like children,[1] and of dying like men, often base courtiers, more than once true knights, displaying constantly, amidst all these contradictions of bearing, only the fulness of their characters. Thus prepared, they could take in everything, sanguinary ferocity and refined generosity, the brutality of shameless debauchery, and the most divine innocence of love, accept all the characters, prostitutes and virgins, princes and mountebanks, pass quickly from trivial buffoonery to lyrical sublimities, listen alternately to the quibbles of clowns and the songs of lovers. The drama even, in order to imitate and satisfy the fertility of their nature, must talk all tongues, pompous, inflated verse, loaded with imagery, and side by side with this, vulgar prose: more, it must distort its natural style and limits; put songs, poetical devices, into the discourse of courtiers and the speeches of statesmen; bring on the stage the fairy world of the opera, as Middleton says, gnomes, nymphs of the land and sea, with their groves and their meadows; compel the gods to descend upon the stage, and hell itself to furnish its

[1] The great Chancellor Burleigh often wept, so harshly was he used by Elizabeth.

world of marvels. No other theatre is so complicated; for nowhere else do we find men so complete.

III.

In this free and universal expansion, the passions had their special bent withal, which was an English one, inasmuch as they were English. After all, in every age, under every civilisation, a people is always itself. Whatever be its dress, goat-skin blouse, gold-laced doublet, black dress-coat, the five or six great instincts which it possessed in its forests, follow it in its palaces and offices. To this day, warlike passions, a gloomy humour, subsist under the regularity and propriety of modern manners.[1] Their native energy and harshness pierce through the perfection of culture and the habits of comfort. Rich young men, on leaving Oxford, go to hunt bears on the Rocky Mountains, the elephant in South Africa, live under canvas, box, jump hedges on horseback, sail their yachts on dangerous coasts, delight in solitude and peril. The ancient Saxon, the old rover of the Scandinavian seas, has not perished. Even at school the children roughly treat one another, withstand one another, fight like men; and their character is so indomitable, that they need the birch and blows to reduce them to the discipline of law. Judge what they were in the sixteenth century; the English race passed then for the most warlike of Europe, the most redoubtable in battle, the most impatient of anything like slavery.[2]

[1] Compare, to understand this character, the parts assigned to James Harlowe by Richardson, old Osborne by Thackeray, Sir Giles Overreach by Massinger, and Manly by Wycherley.

[2] Hentzner's *Travels;* Benvenuto Cellini. See *passim*, the costumes printed in Venice and Germany: *Bellicosissimi.* Froude, i. pp. 19, 52.

"English savages" is what Cellini calls them; and the "great shins of beef" with which they fill themselves, keep up the force and ferocity of their instincts. To harden them thoroughly, institutions work in the same groove with nature. The nation is armed, every man is brought up like a soldier, bound to have arms according to his condition, to exercise himself on Sundays or holidays; from the yeoman to the lord, the old military constitution keeps them enrolled and ready for action.[1] In a state which resembles an army, it is necessary that punishments, as in an army, shall inspire terror; and to make them worse, the hideous Wars of the Roses, which on every flaw of the succession to the throne are ready to break out again, are ever present in their recollection. Such instincts, such a constitution, such a history, raises before them, with tragic severity, an idea of life: death is at hand, as well as wounds, the block, tortures. The fine cloaks of purple which the Renaissances of the South displayed joyfully in the sun, to wear like a holiday garment, are here stained with blood, and edged with black. Throughout,[2] a stern discipline, and the axe ready for every suspicion of treason; great men, bishops, a chancellor, princes, the king's relatives, queens, a protector, all kneeling in the straw, sprinkled the Tower with their blood; one after the other they marched past, stretched out their necks; the Duke of Buckingham, Queen Anne Boleyn, Queen Catherine Howard, the Earl of Surrey, Admiral Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, Lady Jane Grey and her husband, the Duke of Nor-

[1] This is not so true of the English now, if it was in the sixteenth century, as it is of continental nations. The French *lycées* are far more military in character than English schools.—TR.

[2] Froude's *Hist. of England*, vols. i. ii. iii.

thumberland, Mary Stewart, the Earl of Essex, all on the throne, or on the steps of the throne, in the highest rank of honours, beauty, youth, and genius; of the bright procession nothing is left but senseless trunks, marred by the tender mercies of the executioner. Shall I count the funeral pyres, the hangings, living men cut down from the gibbet, disembowelled, quartered,[1] their limbs cast into the fire, their heads exposed on the walls? There is a page in Holinshed which reads like a death register:

"The five and twentith daie of Maie (1535), was in saint Paules church at London examined nineteene men and six women born in Holland, whose opinions were (heretical). Fourteene of them were condemned, a man and a woman of them were burned in Smithfield, the other twelve were sent to other townes, there to be burnt. On the nineteenth of June were three moonkes of the Charterhouse hanged, drawne, and quartered at Tiburne, and their heads and quarters set up about London, for denieng the king to be supreme head of the church. Also the one and twentith of the same moneth, and for the same cause, doctor John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, was beheaded for denieng of the supremacie, and his head set upon London bridge, but his bodie buried within Barking churchyard. The pope had elected him a cardinall, and sent his hat as far as Calais, but his head was off before his hat was on: so that they met not. On the sixt of Julie was Sir Thomas Moore beheaded for the like crime, that is to wit, for denieng the king to be supreme head."[2]

None of these murders seem extraordinary; the chroniclers mention them without growing indignant; the condemned go quietly to the block, as if the thing were

[1] "When his heart was torn out he uttered a deep groan."—*Execution of Parry;* Strype, iii. 251.

[2] Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, iii. p. 793.

perfectly natural. Anne Boleyn said seriously, before giving up her head to the executioner: "I praie God save the king, and send him long to reigne over you, for a gentler, nor a more mercifull prince was there never."[1] Society is, as it were, in a state of siege, so incited that beneath the idea of order every one entertained the idea of the scaffold. They saw it, the terrible machine, planted on all the highways of human life; and the byways as well as the highways led to it. A sort of martial law, introduced by conquests into civil affairs, entered thence into ecclesiastical matters,[2] and social economy ended by being enslaved by it. As in a camp,[3] expenditure, dress, the food of each class, are fixed and restricted; no one might stray out of his district, be idle, live after his own devices. Every stranger was seized, interrogated; if he could not give a good account of himself, the parish-stocks bruised his limbs; as in time of war he would have passed for a spy and an enemy, if caught amidst the army. Any person, says the law,[4] found living idly or loiteringly for the space of three days, shall be marked with a hot iron on his breast, and adjudged as a slave to the man who shall inform against him. This one "shall take the same slave, and give him bread, water, or small drink, and refuse meat, and cause him to work, by beating, chaining, or otherwise, in such work and labour as he shall put him to, be it never so vile." He may sell him, bequeath him, let him out for hire, or trade upon him "after the like sort as they may do of any other their moveable goods or chattels," put a ring of iron about his neck or leg; if he runs away and absents

[1] Holinshed, *Chronicles of England*, iii. p. 797.
[2] Under Henry IV. and Henry V. [3] Froude, i. 15. [4] In 1547.

himself for fourteen days, he is branded on the forehead with a hot iron, and remains a slave for the whole of his life; if he runs away a second time, he is put to death. Sometimes, says More, you might see a score of thieves hung on the same gibbet. In one year[1] forty persons were put to death in the county of Somerset alone, and in each county there were three or four hundred vagabonds who would sometimes gather together and rob in armed bands of sixty at a time. Follow the whole of this history closely, the fires of Mary, the pillories of Elizabeth, and it is plain that the moral tone of the land, like its physical condition, is harsh by comparison with other countries. They have no relish in their enjoyments, as in Italy; what is called Merry England is England given up to animal spirits, a coarse animation produced by abundant feeding, continued prosperity, courage, and self-reliance; voluptuousness does not exist in this climate and this race. Mingled with the beautiful popular beliefs, the lugubrious dreams and the cruel nightmare of witchcraft make their appearance. Bishop Jewell, preaching before the queen, tells her that witches and sorcerers within these few last years are marvellously increased Some ministers assert

"That they have had in their parish at one instant, xvij or xviij witches; meaning such as could worke miracles supernaturallie; that they work spells by which men pine away even unto death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft; that instructed by the devil, they make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. When a child is not baptized, or defended by the sign of

[1] In 1596.

the cross, then the witches catch them from their mothers sides in the night . . . kill them . . . or after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron, untill their flesh be made potable. . . . It is an infallible rule, that everie fortnight, or at the least everie moneth, each witch must kill one child at the least for hir part."

Here was something to make the teeth chatter with fright. Add to this revolting and absurd descriptions, wretched tomfooleries, details about the infernal cauldron, all the nastinesses which could haunt the trite imagination of a hideous and drivelling old woman, and you have the spectacles, provided by Middleton and Shakspeare, and which suit the sentiments of the age and the national humour. The fundamental gloom pierces through the glow and rapture of poetry. Mournful legends have multiplied; every churchyard has its ghost; wherever a man has been murdered his spirit appears. Many people dare not leave their village after sunset. In the evening, before bed-time, men talk of the coach which is seen drawn by headless horses, with headless postilions and coachmen, or of unhappy spirits who, compelled to inhabit the plain, under the sharp north-east wind, pray for the shelter of a hedge or a valley. They dream terribly of death:

"To die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!" [1]

The greatest speak with a sad resignation of the infinite obscurity which embraces our poor, short, glimmering life, our life, which is but a troubled dream;[2] the sad state of humanity, which is but passion, madness, and sorrow; the human being who is himself, perhaps, but a vain phantom, a grievous sick man's dream. In their eyes we roll down a fatal slope, where chance dashes us one against the other, and the inner destiny which urges us onward, only shatters after it has blinded us. And at the end of all is "the silent grave, no conversation, no joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers, no careful father's counsel; nothing's heard, nor nothing is, but all oblivion, dust, and endless darkness."[3] If yet there were nothing. "To die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream." To dream sadly, to fall into a nightmare like the nightmare of life, like that in which we are struggling and crying to-day, gasping with hoarse throat!—this is their idea of man and of existence, the national idea, which fills the stage with calamities and despair, which makes a display of tortures and massacres, which abounds in madness and crime, which holds up death as the issue throughout. A threatening and sombre fog veils their mind like their sky, and joy, like the sun, only appears in its full force now and then. They are different from the Latin race,

[1] Shakspeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. 1. See also *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*.

[2] "We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."—*Tempest*, iv. 1.

[3] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv. 1.

and in the common Renaissance they are regenerated otherwise than the Latin races. The free and full development of pure nature which, in Greece and Italy, ends in the painting of beauty and happy energy, ends here in the painting of ferocious energy, agony, and death.

IV.

Thus was this theatre produced; a theatre unique in history, like the admirable and fleeting epoch from which it sprang, the work and the picture of this young world, as natural, as unshackled, and as tragic as itself. When an original and national drama springs up, the poets who establish it, carry in themselves the sentiments which it represents. They display better than other men the feelings of the public, because those feelings are stronger in them than in other men. The passions which surround them, break forth in their heart with a harsher or a juster cry, and hence their voices become the voices of all. Chivalric and Catholic Spain had her interpreters in her enthusiasts and her Don Quixotes: in Calderon, first a soldier, afterwards a priest; in Lope de Vega, a volunteer at fifteen, a passionate lover, a wandering duellist, a soldier of the Armada, finally, a priest and familiar of the Holy Office; so full of fervour that he fasts till he is exhausted, faints with emotion while singing mass, and in his flagellations stains the walls of his cell with blood. Calm and noble Greece had in her principal tragic poet one of the most accomplished and fortunate of her sons:[1] Sophocles, first in song and palæstra; who at fifteen sang, unclad, the pæan before the trophy of Salamis, and who afterwards,

[1] Διεπονήθη δ' ἐν παισὶ καὶ περὶ παλαίστραν καὶ μουσικὴν, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφορέων ἐστεφανώθη . . . Φιλαθηναιότατος καὶ θεοφιλής.—*Scholiast.*

as ambassador, general, ever loving the gods and impassioned for his state, presented, in his life as in his works, the spectacle of the incomparable harmony which made the beauty of the ancient world, and which the modern world will never more attain to. Eloquent and worldly France, in the age which carried the art of good manners and conversation to its highest pitch, finds, to write her oratorical tragedies and to paint her drawing-room passions, the most able craftsman of words, Racine, a courtier, a man of the world; the most capable, by the delicacy of his tact and the adaptation of his style, of making men of the world and courtiers speak. So in England the poets are in harmony with their works. Almost all are Bohemians; they sprung from the people,[1] were educated, and usually studied at Oxford or Cambridge, but they were poor, so that their education contrasts with their condition. Ben Jonson is the step-son of a bricklayer, and himself a bricklayer; Marlowe is the son of a shoemaker; Shakspeare of a wool merchant; Massinger of a servant of a noble family.[2] They live as they can, get into debt, write for their bread, go on the stage. Peele, Lodge, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Shakspeare, Heywood, are actors; most of the details which we have of their lives are taken from the journal of Henslowe, a retired pawnbroker, later a money-lender and manager of a theatre, who gives them work, advances money to them, receives their manuscripts or their wardrobes as security. For a play he

[1] Except Beaumont and Fletcher.

[2] Hartley Coleridge, in his *Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford*, says of Massinger's father: "We are not certified of the situation which he held in the noble household (Earl of Pembroke), but we may be sure that it was neither menial nor mean. Service in those days was not derogatory to gentle birth."—TR.

gives seven or eight pounds; after the year 1600 prices rise, and reach as high as twenty or twenty-five pounds. It is clear that, even after this increase, the trade of author scarcely brings in bread. In order to earn money, it was necessary, like Shakspeare, to become a manager, to try to have a share in the property of a theatre; but such success is rare, and the life which they lead, a life of actors and artists, improvident, full of excess, lost amid debauchery and acts of violence, amidst women of evil fame, in contact with young profligates, among the temptations of misery, imagination and licence, generally leads them to exhaustion, poverty, and death. Men received enjoyment from them, but neglected and despised them. One actor, for a political allusion, was sent to prison, and only just escaped losing his ears; great men, men in office, abused them like servants. Heywood, who played almost every day, bound himself, in addition, to write a sheet daily, for several years composes at haphazard in taverns, labours and sweats like a true literary hack, and dies leaving two hundred and twenty pieces, of which most are lost. Kyd, one of the earliest in date, died in misery. Shirley, one of the last, at the end of his career, was obliged to become once more a schoolmaster. Massinger dies unknown; and in the parish register we find only this sad mention of him: "Philip Massinger, a stranger." A few months after the death of Middleton, his widow was obliged to ask alms of the City, because he had left nothing. Imagination, as Drummond said of Ben Jonson, oppressed their reason; it is the common failing of poets. They wish to enjoy, and give themselves wholly up to enjoyment; their mood, their heart governs them; in their life, as

in their works, impulses are irresistible; desire comes suddenly, like a wave, drowning reason, resistance—often even giving neither reason nor resistance time to show themselves.[1] Many are roysterers, sad roysterers of the same sort, such as Musset and Murger, who give themselves up to every passion, and "drown their sorrows in the bowl;" capable of the purest and most poetic dreams, of the most delicate and touching tenderness, and who yet can only undermine their health and mar their fame. Such are Nash, Decker, and Greene; Nash, a fantastic satirist, who abused his talent, and conspired like a prodigal against good fortune; Decker, who passed three years in the King's Bench prison; Greene, above all, a pleasing wit, copious, graceful, who took a delight in destroying himself, publicly with tears confessing his vices,[2] and the next moment plunging into them again. These are mere androgynes, true courtesans, in manners, body, and heart. Quitting Cambridge, "with good fellows as free-living as himself," Greene had travelled over Spain, Italy, "in which places he sawe and practizde such villainie as is abhominable to declare." You see the poor man is candid, not sparing himself; he is natural; passionate in everything, repentance or otherwise; above all of ever-varying mood; made for self-contradiction; not self-correction. On his return he became, in London, a supporter of taverns,

[1] See, amongst others, *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, by Heywood. Mrs. Frankfort, so upright of heart, accepts Wendoll at his first offer. Sir Francis Acton, at the sight of her whom he wishes to dishonour, and whom he hates, falls "into an ecstasy," and dreams of nothing save marriage. Compare the sudden transport of Juliet, Romeo, Macbeth, Miranda, etc.; the counsel of Prospero to Fernando, when he leaves him alone for a moment with Miranda.

[2] Compare *La Vie de Bohême* and *Les Nuits d'Hiver*, by Murger; *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, by A. de Musset.

a haunter of evil places. In his *Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance* he says:

"I was dround in pride, whoredom was my daily exercise, and gluttony with drunkenness was my onely delight. . . . After I had wholly betaken me to the penning of plaies (which was my continuall exercise) I was so far from calling upon God that I sildome thought on God, but tooke such delight in swearing and blaspheming the name of God that none could thinke otherwise of me than that I was the child of perdition. These vanities and other trifling pamphlets I penned of love and vaine fantasies was my chiefest stay of living; and for those my vaine discourses I was beloved of the more vainer sort of people, who being my continuall companions, came still to my lodging, and there would continue quaffing, carowsing, and surfeting with me all the day long. . . . If I may have my disire while I live I am satisfied; let me shift after death as I may. . . . 'Hell!' quoth I; 'what talke you of hell to me? I know if I once come there I shall have the company of better men than myselfe; I shall also meete with some madde knaves in that place, and so long as I shall not sit there alone, my care is the lesse. . . . If I feared the judges of the bench no more than I dread the judgments of God I would before I slept dive into one carles bagges or other, and make merrie with the shelles I found in them so long as they would last.'"

A little later he is seized with remorse, marries, depicts in delicious verse the regularity and calm of an upright life; then returns to London, spends his property and his wife's fortune with "a sorry ragged queane," in the company of ruffians, pimps, sharpers, courtesans; drinking, blaspheming, wearing himself out by sleepless nights and orgies; writing for bread, sometimes amid the brawling and effluvia of his wretched lodging, lighting upon thoughts of adoration and love, worthy

of Rolla;[1] very often disgusted with himself, seized with a fit of weeping between two merry bouts, and writing little pieces to accuse himself, to regret his wife, to convert his comrades, or to warn young people against the tricks of prostitutes and swindlers. He was soon worn out by this kind of life; six years were enough to exhaust him. An indigestion arising from Rhenish wine and pickled herrings finished him. If it had not been for his landlady, who succoured him, he "would have perished in the streets." He lasted a little longer, and then his light went out; now and then he begged her "pittifully for a penny pott of malmesie;" he was covered with lice, he had but one shirt, and when his own was "a washing," he was obliged to borrow her husband's. "His doublet and hose and sword were sold for three shillinges," and the poor folks paid the cost of his burial, four shillings for the winding-sheet, and six and fourpence for the burial.

In such low places, on such dunghills, amid such excesses and violence, dramatic genius forced its way, and amongst others, that of the first, of the most powerful, of the true founder of the dramatic school, Christopher Marlowe.

Marlowe was an ill-regulated, dissolute, outrageously vehement and audacious spirit, but grand and sombre, with the genuine poetic frenzy; pagan moreover, and rebellious in manners and creed. In this universal return to the senses, and in this impulse of natural forces which brought on the Renaissance, the corporeal instincts and the ideas which hallow them, break forth impetuously. Marlowe, like Greene, like Kett,[2] is a

[1] The hero of one of Alfred de Musset's poems.—TR.

[2] Burnt in 1589.

sceptic, denies God and Christ, blasphemes the Trinity, declares Moses "a juggler," Christ more worthy of death than Barabbas, says that "yf he wer to write a new religion, he wolde undertake both a more excellent and more admirable methode," and "almost in every company he commeth, perswadeth men to Athiesme."[1] Such were the rages, the rashnesses, the excesses which liberty of thought gave rise to in these new minds, who for the first time, after so many centuries, dared to walk unfettered. From his father's shop, crowded with children, from the straps and awls, he found himself studying at Cambridge, probably through the patronage of a great man, and on his return to London, in want, amid the licence of the green-room, the low houses and taverns, his head was in a ferment, and his passions became excited. He turned actor; but having broken his leg in a scene of debauchery, he remained lame, and could no longer appear on the boards. He openly avowed his infidelity, and a prosecution was begun, which, if time had not failed, would probably have brought him to the stake. He made love to a drab, and in trying to stab his rival, his hand was turned, so that his own blade entered his eye and his brain, and he died, cursing and blaspheming. He was only thirty years old.

Think what poetry could emanate from a life so passionate, and occupied in such a manner! First, exaggerated declamation, heaps of murder, atrocities, a pompous and furious display of tragedy bespattered with blood, and passions raised to a pitch of madness. All the foundations of the English stage, *Ferrex and*

[1] I have used Marlowe's *Works*, ed. Dyce, 3 vols., 1850. Append. i. vol. 3.—TR.

Porrex, Cambyses, Hieronymo, even the *Pericles* of Shakspeare, reach the same height of extravagance, magniloquence, and horror.[1] It is the first outbreak of youth. Recall Schiller's *Robbers,* and how modern democracy has recognised for the first time its picture in the metaphors and cries of Charles Moor.[2] So here the characters struggle and roar, stamp on the earth, gnash their teeth, shake their fists against heaven. The trumpets sound, the drums beat, coats of mail file past, armies clash, men stab each other, or themselves; speeches are full of gigantic threats and lyrical figures;[3] kings die, straining a bass voice; "now doth ghastly death with greedy talons gripe my bleeding heart, and like a harpy tires on my life." The hero in *Tamburlaine the Great*[4] is seated on a chariot drawn by chained kings;

[1] See especially *Titus Andronicus,* attributed to Shakspeare: there are parricides, mothers whom they cause to eat their children, a young girl who appears on the stage violated, with her tongue and hands cut off.

[2] The chief character in Schiller's *Robbers,* a virtuous brigand and redresser of wrongs.—TR.

[3] For in a field, whose superficies
Is cover'd with a liquid purple veil,
And sprinkled with the brains of slaughter'd men,
My royal chair of state shall be advanc'd;
And he that means to place himself therein,
Must armed wade up to the chin in blood. . . .
And I would strive to swim through pools of blood,
Or make a bridge of murder'd carcasses,
Whose arches should be fram'd with bones of Turks,
Ere I would lose the title of a king.
Tamburlaine, part ii. i. 3.

[4] The editor of Marlowe's *Works,* Pickering, 1826, says in his Introduction: "Both the matter and style of *Tamburlaine,* however, differ materially from Marlowe's other compositions, and doubts have more than once been suggested as to whether the play was properly assigned to him. We think that Marlowe did not write it." Dyce is of a contrary opinion.—TR.

he burns towns, drowns women and children, puts men to the sword, and finally, seized with an inscrutable sickness, raves in monstrous outcries against the gods, whose hands afflict his soul, and whom he would fain dethrone. There already is the picture of senseless pride, of blind and murderous rage, which passing through many devastations, at last arms against heaven itself. The overflowing of savage and immoderate instinct produces this mighty sounding verse, this prodigality of carnage, this display of splendours and exaggerated colours, this railing of demoniacal passions, this audacity of grand impiety. If in the dramas which succeed it, *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, the bombast decreases, the violence remains. Barabas the Jew maddened with hate, is thenceforth no longer human; he has been treated by the Christians like a beast, and he hates them like a beast. He advises his servant Ithamore in the following words:

"Hast thou no trade? then listen to my words,
And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee:
First, be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.
. . . I walk abroad a-nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls;
Sometimes I go about and poison wells. . . .
Being young, I studied physic, and began
To practise first upon the Italian;
There I enrich'd the priests with burials,
And always kept the sexton's arms in ure
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells. . . .
I fill'd the jails with bankrouts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals;

And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him." [1]

All these cruelties he boasts of and chuckles over, like a demon who rejoices in being a good executioner, and plunges his victims in the very extremity of anguish. His daughter has two Christian suitors; and by forged letters he causes them to slay each other. In despair she takes the veil, and to avenge himself he poisons his daughter and the whole convent. Two friars wish to denounce him, then to convert him; he strangles the first, and jokes with his slave Ithamore, a cut-throat by profession, who loves his trade, rubs his hands with joy, and says:

" Pull amain,
" Tis neatly done, sir; here's no print at all.
So, let him lean upon his staff; excellent! he stands as if he were begging of bacon." [2]
" O mistress, I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had." [3]

The second friar comes up, and they accuse him of the murder:

" *Barabas.* Heaven bless me! what, a friar a murderer!
When shall you see a Jew commit the like?
Ithamore. Why, a Turk could ha' done no more.
Bar. To-morrow is the sessions; you shall to it—
Come Ithamore, let's help to take him hence.
Friar. Villains, I am a sacred person; touch me not
Bar. The law shall touch you; we'll but lead you, we:
'Las, I could weep at your calamity!" [4]

[1] Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta,* ii. p. 275 *et passim.*
[2] *Ibid.* iv. p. 311. [3] *Ibid.* iii. p. 291. [4] *Ibid.* iv. p. 313.

We have also two other poisonings, an infernal machine to blow up the Turkish garrison, a plot to cast the Turkish commander into a well. Barabas falls into it himself, and dies in the hot cauldron,[1] howling, hardened, remorseless, having but one regret, that he had not done evil enough. These are the ferocities of the middle-age; we might find them to this day among the companions of Ali Pacha, among the pirates of the Archipelago; we retain pictures of them in the paintings of the fifteenth century, which represent a king with his court, seated calmly round a living man who is being flayed; in the midst the flayer on his knees is working conscientiously, very careful not to spoil the skin.[2]

All this is pretty strong, you will say; these people kill too readily, and too quickly. It is on this very account that the painting is a true one. For the specialty of the men of the time, as of Marlowe's characters, is the abrupt commission of a deed; they are children, robust children. As a horse kicks out instead of speaking, so they pull out their knives instead of asking an explanation. Nowadays we hardly know what nature is; instead of observing it we still retain the benevolent prejudices of the eighteenth century; we only see it humanised by two centuries of culture, and we take its acquired calm for an innate moderation. The foundations of the natural man are irresistible impulses, passions, desires, greeds; all blind. He sees a woman,[3] thinks her beautiful; suddenly he rushes towards her; people try to restrain him, he kills these

[1] Up to this time, in England, poisoners were cast into a boiling cauldron.

[2] In the Museum of Ghent.

[3] See in the *Jew of Malta* the seduction of Ithamore, by Bellamira. a rough, but truly admirable picture.

people, gluts his passion, then thinks no more of it, save when at times a vague picture of a moving lake of blood crosses his brain and makes him gloomy. Sudden and extreme resolves are confused in his mind with desire; barely planned, the thing is done; the wide interval which a Frenchman places between the idea of an action and the action itself is not to be found here.[1] Barabas conceived murders, and straightway murders were accomplished; there is no deliberation, no pricks of conscience; that is how he commits a score of them; his daughter leaves him, he becomes unnatural, and poisons her; his confidential servant betrays him, he disguises himself, and poisons him. Rage seizes these men like a fit, and then they are forced to kill. Benvenuto Cellini relates how, being offended, he tried to restrain himself, but was nearly suffocated; and that in order to cure himself, he rushed with his dagger upon his opponent. So, in *Edward II.*, the nobles immediately appeal to arms; all is excessive and unforeseen: between two replies the heart is turned upside down, transported to the extremes of hate or tenderness. Edward, seeing his favourite Gaveston again, pours out before him his treasure, casts his dignities at his feet, gives him his seal, himself, and, on a threat from the Bishop of Coventry, suddenly cries:

> "Throw off his golden mitre, rend his stole,
> And in the channel christen him anew."[2]

[1] Nothing could be falser than the hesitation and arguments of Schiller's *William Tell*; for a contrast, see Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*. In 1377, Wiclif pleaded in St. Paul's before the Bishop of London, and that raised a quarrel. The Duke of Lancaster, Wiclif's protector, "threatened to drag the bishop out of the church by the hair;" and next day the furious crowd sacked the duke's palace.

[2] Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, i. p. 173.

Then, when the queen supplicates:

"Fawn not on me, French strumpet! get thee gone. . . .
Speak not unto her: let her droop and pine."[1]

Furies and hatreds clash together like horsemen in battle. The Earl of Lancaster draws his sword on Gaveston to slay him, before the king; Mortimer wounds Gaveston. These powerful loud voices growl; the noblemen will not even let a dog approach the prince, and rob them of their rank. Lancaster says of Gaveston:

"... He comes not back,
Unless the sea cast up his shipwrack'd body.
Warwick. And to behold so sweet a sight as that,
There's none here but would run his horse to death."[2]

They have seized Gaveston, and intend to hang him "at a bough;" they refuse to let him speak a single minute with the king. In vain they are entreated; when they do at last consent, they are sorry for it; it is a prey they want immediately, and Warwick, seizing him by force, "strake off his head in a trench." Those are the men of the middle-age. They have the fierceness, the tenacity, the pride of big, well-fed, thorough-bred bull-dogs. It is this sternness and impetuosity of primitive passions which produced the Wars of the Roses, and for thirty years drove the nobles on each other's swords and to the block.

What is there beyond all these frenzies and gluttings of blood? The idea of crushing necessity and inevitable ruin in which everything sinks and comes to an end. Mortimer, brought to the block, says with a smile:

[1] Marlowe, *Edward the Second*, p. 186. [2] *Ibid.* p. 188.

"Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
There is a point, to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down: that point I touch'd,
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?—
Farewell, fair queen; weep not for Mortimer,
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,
Goes to discover countries yet unknown." [1]

Weigh well these grand words; they are a cry from the heart, the profound confession of Marlowe, as also of Byron, and of the old sea-kings. The northern paganism is fully expressed in this heroic and mournful sigh: it is thus they imagine the world so long as they remain on the outside of Christianity, or as soon as they quit it. Thus, when men see in life, as they did, nothing but a battle of unchecked passions, and in death but a gloomy sleep, perhaps filled with mournful dreams, there is no other supreme good but a day of enjoyment and victory. They glut themselves, shutting their eyes to the issue, except that they may be swallowed up on the morrow. That is the master-thought of *Doctor Faustus*, the greatest of Marlowe's dramas: to satisfy his soul, no matter at what price, or with what results:

"A sound magician is a mighty god. . . .
How am I glutted with conceit of this! . . .
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl. . .
I'll have them read me strange philosophy,
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wertenberg. . . .

[1] *Edward the Second*, last scene, p. 288.

Like lions shall they guard us when we please;
Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves,
Or Lapland giants, trotting by our sides;
Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than have the white breasts of the queen of love."[1]

What brilliant dreams, what desires, what vast or voluptuous wishes, worthy of a Roman Cæsar or an eastern poet, eddy in this teeming brain! To satiate them, to obtain four-and-twenty years of power, Faustus gives his soul, without fear, without need of temptation, at the first outset, voluntarily, so sharp is the prick within:

"Had I as many souls as there be stars,
I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.
By him I'll be great emperor of the world,
And make a bridge thorough the moving air. . . .
Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thine own?"[2]

And with that he gives himself full swing: he wants to know everything, to have everything; a book in which he can behold all herbs and trees which grow upon the earth; another in which shall be drawn all the constellations and planets; another which shall bring him gold when he wills it, and "the fairest courtezans:" another which summons "men in armour" ready to execute his commands, and which holds "whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning" chained at his disposal. He is like a child, he stretches out his hands for everything shining; then grieves to think of hell, then lets himself be diverted by shows:

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, i. p. 9, *et passim*.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 22, 29.

"*Faustus.* O this feeds my soul!
Lucifer. Tut, Faustus, in hell is all manner of delight.
Faustus. Oh, might I see hell, and return again,
How happy were I then!" . . . .[1]

He is conducted, being invisible, over the whole world: lastly to Rome, amongst the ceremonies of the Pope's court. Like a schoolboy during a holiday, he has insatiable eyes, he forgets everything before a pageant, he amuses himself in playing tricks, in giving the Pope a box on the ear, in beating the monks, in performing magic tricks before princes, finally in drinking, feasting, filling his belly, deadening his thoughts. In his transport he becomes an atheist, and says there is no hell, that those are "old wives' tales." Then suddenly the sad idea knocks at the gates of his brain.

"I will renounce this magic, and repent . . .
My heart's so harden'd, I cannot repent:
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
'Faustus, thou art damn'd!' then swords, and knives,
Poison, guns, halters, and envenom'd steel
Are laid before me to despatch myself;
And long ere this I should have done the deed,
Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.
Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
Of Alexander's love and Œnon's death?
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistophilis?
Why should I die, then, or basely despair?
I am resolv'd; Faustus shall ne'er repent.—
Come Mephistophilis, let us dispute again,
And argue of divine astrology.

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, i. p. 43.

Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?
Are all celestial bodies but one globe,
As is the substance of this centric earth? . . ."[1]

"One thing . . . let me crave of thee
To glut the longing of my heart's desire. . . .
Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena. . . .
O thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars!"[2]

"Oh, my God, I would weep! but the devil draws in my tears. Gush forth blood, instead of tears! yea, life and soul! Oh, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands; but see, they hold them, they hold them; Lucifer and Mephistophilis." . . .[3]

"Ah, Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come. . . .
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
Oh, I'll leap up to my God!—Who pulls me down?—
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ,
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ,
Yet will I call on him. . . .
Ah, half the hour is past! 'twill all be past anon. . . .

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 37. [2] *Ibid.* p. 75. [3] *Ibid.* p. 78.

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd. . . .
It strikes, it strikes. . . .
Oh soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!" [1]

There is the living, struggling, natural, personal man, not the philosophic type which Goethe has created, but a primitive and genuine man, hot-headed, fiery, the slave of his passions, the sport of his dreams, wholly engrossed in the present, moulded by his lusts, contradictions, and follies, who amidst noise and starts, cries of pleasure and anguish, rolls, knowing it and willing it, down the slope and crags of his precipice. The whole English drama is here, as a plant in its seed, and Marlowe is to Shakspeare what Perugino was to Raphael.

V.

Gradually art is being formed; and toward the close of the century it is complete. Shakspeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Webster, Massinger, Ford, Middleton, Heywood, appear together, or close upon each other, a new and favoured generation, flourishing largely in the soil fertilised by the efforts of the generation which preceded them. Thenceforth the scenes are developed and assume consistency; the characters cease to move all of a piece, the drama is no longer like a piece of statuary. The poet who a little while ago knew only how to strike or kill, introduces now a sequence of situation and a rationale in intrigue. He begins to prepare the way for sentiments, to forewarn us of events, to combine effects, and we find a theatre at last, the

[1] Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 80.

most complete, the most life-like, and also the most strange that ever existed.

We must follow its formation, and regard the drama when it was formed, that is, in the minds of its authors. What was going on in these minds? What sorts of ideas were born there, and how were they born? In the first place, they see the event, whatever it be, and they see it as it is; I mean that they have it within themselves, with its persons and details, beautiful and ugly, even dull and grotesque. If it is a trial, the judge is there, in their minds, in his place, with his physiognomy and his warts; the plaintiff in another place, with his spectacles and brief-bag; the accused is opposite, stooping and remorseful; each with his friends, cobblers, or lords; then the buzzing crowd behind, all with their grinning faces, their bewildered or kindling eyes.[1] It is a genuine trial which they imagine, a trial like those they have seen before the justice, where they screamed or shouted as witnesses or interested parties, with their quibbling terms, their pros and cons, the scribblings, the sharp voices of the counsel, the stamping of feet, the crowding, the smell of their fellow-men, and so forth. The endless myriads of circumstances which accompany and influence every event, crowd round that event in their heads, and not merely the externals, that is, the visible and picturesque traits, the details of colour and costume, but also, and chiefly, the internals, that is, the motions of anger and joy, the secret tumult of the soul, the ebb and flow of ideas and passions which are expressed by the countenance, swell the veins, make a man to grind his teeth, to clench his fists, which urge

[1] See the trial of Vittoria Corombona, of Virginia in Webster, of Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar in Shakspeare.

him on or restrain him. They see all the details, the tides that sway a man, one from without, another from within, one through another, one within another, both together without faltering and without ceasing. And what is this insight but sympathy, an imitative sympathy, which puts us in another's place, which carries over their agitations to our own breasts, which makes our life a little world, able to reproduce the great one in abstract? Like the characters they imagine, poets and spectators make gestures, raise their voices, act. No speech or story can show their inner mood, but it is the scenic effect which can manifest it. As some men invent a language for their ideas, so these act and mimic them; theatrical imitation and figured representation is their genuine speech: all other expression, the lyrical song of Æschylus, the reflective symbolism of Goethe, the oratorical development of Racine, would be impossible for them. Involuntarily, instantaneously, without forecast, they cut life into scenes, and carry it piecemeal on the boards; this goes so far, that often a mere character becomes an actor,[1] playing a part within a part; the scenic faculty is the natural form of their mind. Beneath the effort of this instinct, all the accessory parts of the drama come before the footlights and expand before our eyes. A battle has been fought; instead of relating it, they bring it before the public, trumpets and drums, pushing crowds, slaughtering combatants. A shipwreck happens; straightway the ship is before the spectator, with the sailors' oaths, the technical orders of the pilot. Of all the details of

[1] Falstaff in Shakspeare; the queen in *London*, by Greene and Decker; Rosalind in Shakspeare.

human life,[1] tavern-racket and statesmen's councils, scullion's talk and court processions, domestic tenderness and pandering,—none is too small or too lofty: these things exist in life—let them exist on the stage, each in full, in the rough, atrocious, or absurd, just as they are, no matter how. Neither in Greece, nor Italy, nor Spain, nor France, has an art been seen which tried so boldly to express the soul, and its innermost depths —the truth, and the whole truth.

How did they succeed, and what is this new art which tramples on all ordinary rules? It is an art for all that, since it is natural; a great art, since it embraces more things, and that more deeply than others do, like the art of Rembrandt and Rubens; but like theirs, it is a Teutonic art, and one whose every step is in contrast with those of classical art. What the Greeks and Romans, the originators of the latter, sought in everything, was charm and order. Monuments, statues, and paintings, the theatre, eloquence and poetry, from Sophocles to Racine, they shaped all their work in the same mould, and attained beauty by the same method. In the infinite entanglement and complexity of things, they grasped a small number of simple ideas, which they embraced in a small number of simple representations, so that the vast confused vegetation of life is presented to the mind from that time forth, pruned and reduced, and perhaps easily embraced at a single glance. A square of walls with rows of columns all alike; a symmetrical group of draped or undraped forms; a young man standing up and raising one arm; a wounded warrior who will not return to the

[1] In Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* there is an admirable accouchement scene.

camp, though they beseech him: this, in their noblest epoch, was their architecture, their painting, their sculpture, and their theatre. No poetry but a few sentiments not very intricate, always natural, not toned down, intelligible to all; no eloquence but a continuous argument, a limited vocabulary, the loftiest ideas brought down to their sensible origin, so that children can understand such eloquence and feel such poetry; and in this sense they are classical.[1] In the hands of Frenchmen, the last inheritors of the simple art, these great legacies of antiquity undergo no change. If poetic genius is less, the structure of mind has not altered. Racine puts on the stage a sole action, whose details he adjusts, and whose course he regulates; no incident, nothing unforeseen, no appendices or incongruities; no secondary intrigue. The subordinate parts are effaced; at the most four or five principal characters, the fewest possible; the rest, reduced to the condition of confidants, take the tone of their masters, and merely reply to them. All the scenes are connected, and flow insensibly one into the other; and every scene, like the entire piece, has its order and progress. The tragedy stands out symmetrically and clear in the midst of human life, like a complete and solitary temple which limns its regular outline on the luminous azure of the sky. In England all is different. All that the French call proportion and fitness is wanting; Englishmen do not trouble themselves about them, they do not need them. There is no unity; they leap suddenly over twenty years, or

[1] This is, in fact, the English view of the French mind, which is doubtless a refinement, many times refined, of the classical spirit. But M. Taine has seemingly not taken into account such products as the Medea on the one hand, and the works of Aristophanes and the Latin sensualists on the other.—TR.

five hundred leagues. There are twenty scenes in an act—we stumble without preparation from one to the other, from tragedy to buffoonery; usually it appears as though the action gained no ground; the different personages waste their time in conversation, dreaming, displaying their character. We were moved, anxious for the issue, and here they bring us in quarrelling servants, lovers making poetry. Even the dialogue and speeches, which we would think ought particularly to be of a regular and continuous flow of engrossing ideas, remain stagnant, or are scattered in windings and deviations. At first sight we fancy we are not advancing, we do not feel at every phrase that we have made a step. There are none of those solid pleadings, none of those conclusive discussions, which every moment add reason to reason, objection to objection; people might say that the different personages only knew how to scold, to repeat themselves, and to mark time. And the disorder is as great in general as in particular things. They heap a whole reign, a complete war, an entire novel, into a drama; they cut up into scenes an English chronicle or an Italian novel: this is all their art; the events matter little; whatever they are, they accept them. They have no idea of progressive and individual action. Two or three actions connected endwise, or entangled one within another, two or three incomplete endings badly contrived, and opened up again; no machinery but death, scattered right and left and unforeseen: such is the logic of their method. The fact is, that our logic, the Latin, fails them. Their mind does not march by the smooth and straightforward paths of rhetoric and eloquence. It reaches the same end, but by other approaches. It is at once more compre-

hensive and less regular than ours. It demands a conception more complete, but less consecutive. It proceeds, not as with us, by a line of uniform steps, but by sudden leaps and long pauses. It does not rest satisfied with a simple idea drawn from a complex fact, but demands the complex fact entire, with its numberless particularities, its interminable ramifications. It sees in man not a general passion—ambition, anger, or love; not a pure quality — happiness, avarice, folly; but a character, that is, the imprint, wonderfully complicated, which inheritance, temperament, education, calling, age, society, conversation, habits, have stamped on every man; an incommunicable and individual imprint, which, once stamped in a man, is not found again in any other. It sees in the hero not only the hero, but the individual, with his manner of walking, drinking, swearing, blowing his nose; with the tone of his voice, whether he is thin or fat;[1] and thus plunges to the bottom of things, with every look, as by a miner's deep shaft. This sunk, it little cares whether the second shaft be two paces or a hundred from the first; enough that it reaches the same depth, and serves equally well to display the inner and invisible layer. Logic is here from beneath, not from above. It is the unity of a character which binds the two actions of the personage, as the unity of an impression connects the two scenes of a drama. To speak exactly, the spectator is like a man whom we should lead along a wall pierced at separate intervals with little windows; at every window he catches for an instant a glimpse of a new landscape, with its million details: the walk over,

[1] See *Hamlet, Coriolanus, Hotspur.* The queen in *Hamlet* (v. 2) says: "He (Hamlet)'s fat, and scant of breath."

if he is of Latin race and training, he finds a medley of images jostling in his head, and asks for a map that he may recollect himself; if he is of German race and training, he perceives as a whole, by natural concentration, the wide country which he has only seen piecemeal. Such a conception, by the multitude of details which it combines, and by the depth of the vistas which it embraces, is a half-vision which shakes the whole soul. What its works are about to show us is, with what energy, what disdain of contrivance, what vehemence of truth, it dares to coin and hammer the human medal; with what liberty it is able to reproduce in full prominence worn out characters, and the extreme flights of virgin nature.

VI.

Let us consider the different personages which this art, so suited to depict real manners, and so apt to paint the living soul, goes in search of amidst the real manners and the living souls of its time and country. They are of two kinds, as befits the nature of the drama: one which produces terror, the other which moves to pity; these graceful and feminine, those manly and violent. All the differences of sex, all the extremes of life, all the resources of the stage, are embraced in this contrast; and if ever there was a complete contrast, it is here.

The reader must study for himself some of these pieces, or he will have no idea of the fury into which the stage is hurled; force and transport are driven every instant to the point of atrocity, and further still, if there be any further. Assassinations, poisonings, tortures, outcries of madness and rage; no passion and

no suffering are too extreme for their energy or their effort. Anger is with them a madness, ambition a frenzy, love a delirium. Hippolyto, who has lost his mistress, says, "Were thine eyes clear as mine, thou might'st behold her, watching upon yon battlements of stars, how I observe them:"[1] Aretus, to be avenged on Valentinian, poisons him after poisoning himself, and with the death-rattle in his throat, is brought to his enemy's side, to give him a foretaste of agony. Queen Brunhalt has panders with her on the stage, and causes her two sons to slay each other. Death everywhere; at the close of every play, all the great people wade in blood: with slaughter and butcheries, the stage becomes a field of battle or a churchyard.[2] Shall I describe a few of these tragedies? In the *Duke of Milan*, Francesco, to avenge his sister, who has been seduced, wishes to seduce in his turn the Duchess Marcelia, wife of Sforza, the seducer; he desires her, he will have her; he says to her, with cries of love and rage:

> "For with this arm I'll swim through seas of blood,
> Or make a bridge, arch'd with the bones of men,
> But I will grasp my aims in you, my dearest,
> Dearest, and best of women!"[3]

For he wishes to strike the duke through her, whether she lives or dies, if not by dishonour, at least by murder; the first is as good as the second, nay better,

[1] Middleton, *The Honest Whore*, part i. iv. 1.

[2] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Valentinian*, *Thierry and Theodoret*. See Massinger's *Picture*, which resembles Musset's *Barberine*. Its crudity, the extraordinary and repulsive energy, will show the difference of the two ages.

[3] Massinger's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, *Duke of Milan*, ii. 1.

for so he will do a greater injury. He calumniates her, and the duke, who adores her, kills her; then, being undeceived, loses his senses, will not believe she is dead, has the body brought in, kneels before it, rages and weeps. He knows now the name of the traitor, and at the thought of him he swoons or raves:

> 'I'll follow him to hell, but I will find him,
> And there live a fourth Fury to torment him.
> Then, for this cursed hand and arm that guided
> The wicked steel, I'll have them, joint by joint,
> With burning irons sear'd off, which I will eat,
> I being a vulture fit to taste such carrion." [1]

Suddenly he gasps for breath, and falls; Francesco has poisoned him. The duke dies, and the murderer is led to torture. There are worse scenes than this; to find sentiments strong enough, they go to those which change the very nature of man. Massinger puts on the stage a father who judges and condemns his daughter, stabbed by her husband; Webster and Ford, a son who assassinates his mother; Ford, the incestuous loves of a brother and sister.[2] Irresistible love overtakes them; the ancient love of Pasiphaë and Myrrha, a kind of madness-like enchantment, and beneath which the will entirely gives way. Giovanni says:

> "Lost! I am lost! My fates have doom'd my death!
> The more I strive, I love; the more I love,
> The less I hope: I see my ruin certain. . . .
> I have even wearied heaven with pray'rs, dried up

[1] *Duke of Milan*, v. 2.

[2] Massinger, *The Fatal Dowry;* Webster and Ford, *A late Murther of the Sonne upon the Mother* (a play not extant); Ford, *'Tis pity she's a Whore.* See also Ford's *Broken Heart*, with its sublime scenes of agony and madness.

The spring of my continual tears, even starv'd
My veins with *daily fasts : what wit or art*
Could counsel, I have *practis'd ; but, alas !*
I find all these but *dreams, and old men's tales,*
To fright unsteady youth : *I am still the same ;*
Or I must speak, or burst." [1]

What transports follow! what fierce and bitter joys, and how short too, how grievous and mingled with anguish, especially for her! She is married to another. Read for yourself the admirable and horrible scene which represents the wedding night. She is pregnant, and Soranzo, the husband, drags her along the ground, with curses, demanding the name of her lover:

" Come strumpet, famous whore? . . .
Harlot, rare, notable harlot,
That with thy brazen face maintain'st thy sin,
Was there no man in Parma to be bawd
To your loose cunning whoredom else but I?
Must your hot itch and plurisy of lust,
The heyday of your luxury, be fed
Up to a surfeit, and could none but I
Be pick'd out to be cloak to your close tricks,
Your belly-sports?—Now I must be the dad
To all that gallimaufry that is stuff'd
In thy corrupted bastard-bearing womb?
Say, must I?
Annabella. Beastly man? why, 'tis thy fate.
I su'd not to thee. . . .
S. Tell me by whom." [2]

She gets excited, feels and cares for nothing more, refuses to tell the name of her lover, and praises him

[1] Ford's Works, ed. H. Coleridge, 1859, *'Tis pity she's a Whore*, i. 3.
[2] *Ibid.* iv. 3.

in the following words. This praise in the midst of danger is like a rose she has plucked, and of which the odour intoxicates her:

"*A.* Soft! 'twas not in my bargain.
Yet somewhat, sir, to stay your longing stomach
I am content t' acquaint you with THE man,
The more than man, that got this sprightly boy,—
(For 'tis a boy, and therefore glory, sir,
Your heir shall be a son.)
S. Damnable monster?
A. Nay, an you will not hear, I'll speak no more.
S. Yes, speak, and speak thy last.
A. A match, a match? . . .
You, why you are not worthy once to name
His name without true worship, or, indeed,
Unless you kneel'd to hear another name him.
S. What was he call'd?
A. We are not come to that;
Let it suffice that you shall have the glory
To father what so brave a father got. . . .
S. Dost thou laugh?
Come, whore, tell me your lover, or, by truth
I'll hew thy flesh to shreds; who is't?"[1]

She laughs; the excess of shame and terror has given her courage; she insults him, she sings; so like a woman!

"*A.* (Sings) *Che morte piu dolce che morire per amore.*
S. Thus will I pull thy hair, and thus I'll drag
Thy lust be-leper'd body through the dust. . . .
(*Hales her up and down*)
A. Be a gallant hangman. . . .
I leave revenge behind, and thou shalt feel 't. . . .

[1] *'Tis pity she's a Whore*, iv. 3.

(*To Vasquez.*) Pish, do not beg for me, I prize my life
As nothing; if the man will needs be mad,
Why, let him take it."[1]

In the end all is discovered, and the two lovers know they must die. For the last time, they see each other in Annabella's chamber, listening to the noise of the feast below which shall serve for their funeral-feast. Giovanni, who has made his resolve like a madman, sees Annabella richly dressed, dazzling. He regards her in silence, and remembers the past. He weeps and says:

"These are the funeral tears,
Shed on your grave; these furrow'd-up my cheeks
When first I lov'd and knew not how to woo. . . .
Give me your hand: how sweetly life doth run
In these well-colour'd veins! How constantly
These palms do promise health! . . .
Kiss me again, forgive me. . . . Farewell."[2] . . .

He then stabs her, enters the banqueting room, with her heart upon his dagger:

"Soranzo, see this heart, which was thy wife's.
Thus I exchange it royally for thine."[3]

He kills him, and casting himself on the swords of banditti, dies. It would seem that tragedy could go no further.

But it did go further; for if these are melodramas, they are sincere, composed, not like those of to-day, by Grub Street writers for peaceful citizens, but by impassioned men, experienced in tragical arts, for a violent, over-fed melancholy race. From Shakspeare to Milton, Swift, Hogarth, no race has been more glutted with coarse

[1] '*Tis pity she's a Whore*, iv. 3. [2] *Ibid.* v. 5. [3] *Ibid.* v. 6.

expressions and horrors, and its poets supply them plentifully; Ford less so than Webster; the latter a sombre man, whose thoughts seem incessantly to be haunting tombs and charnel-houses. "Places in court," he says, are but like beds in the hospital, where this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and lower."[1] Such are his images. No one has equalled Webster in creating desperate characters, utter wretches, bitter misanthropes,[2] in blackening and blaspheming human life, above all, in depicting the shameless depravity and refined ferocity of Italian manners.[3] The Duchess of Malfi has secretly married her steward Antonio, and her brother learns that she has children; almost mad[4] with rage and wounded pride, he remains silent, waiting until he knows the name of the father; then he arrives all of a sudden, means to kill her, but so that she shall taste the lees of death. She must suffer much, but above all, she must not die too quickly! She must suffer in mind; these griefs are worse than the body's. He sends assassins to kill Antonio, and meanwhile comes to her in the dark, with affectionate words; pretends to

[1] Webster's Works, ed. Dyce, 1857, *Duchess of Malfi*, i. 1.

[2] The characters of Bosola, Flaminio.

[3] See Stendhal *Chronicles of Italy, The Cenci, The Duchess of Palliano*, and all the biographies of the time; of the Borgias, of Bianca Capello, of Vittoria Accoramboni.

[4] Ferdinand, one of the brothers, says (ii. 5):

> "I would have their bodies
> Burnt in a coal-pit with the ventage stopp'd,
> That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven;
> Or dip the sheets they lie in in pitch or sulphur,
> Wrap them in't, and then light them as a match;
> Or else to-boil their bastard to a cullis,
> And give't his lecherous father to renew
> The sin of his back."

be reconciled, and suddenly shows her waxen figures, covered with wounds, whom she takes for her slaughtered husband and children. She staggers under the blow, and remains in gloom without crying out. Then she says:

"Good comfortable fellow,
Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel
To have all his bones new set; entreat him live
To be executed again. Who must despatch me? . . .
Bosola. Come, be of comfort, I will save your life.
Duchess, Indeed, I have not leisure to tend
So small a business.
B. Now, by my life, I pity you.
D. Thou art a fool, then,
To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched
As cannot pity itself. I am full of daggers." [1]

Slow words, spoken in a whisper, as in a dream, or as if she were speaking of a third person. Her brother sends to her a company of madmen, who leap and howl and rave around her in mournful wise; a pitiful sight, calculated to unseat the reason; a kind of foretaste of hell. She says nothing, looking upon them; her heart is dead, her eyes fixed, with vacant stare:

Cariola. What think you of, madam?
Duchess. Of nothing:
When I muse thus, I sleep.
C. Like a madman, with your eyes open?
D. Dost thou think we shall know one another
In the other world?
C. Yes, out of question.
D. O that it were possible we might
But hold some two days' conference with the dead!

[1] *Duchess of Malfi,* iv. 1.

From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,
I never shall know here. I'll tell thee a miracle;
I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow:
The heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,
The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.
I am acquainted with sad misery
As the tann'd galley-slave is with his oar."[1] . . .

In this state, the limbs, like those of one who has been newly executed, still quiver, but the sensibility is worn out; the miserable body only stirs mechanically; it has suffered too much. At last the gravedigger comes with executioners, a coffin, and they sing before her a funeral dirge:

"*Duchess.* Farewell, Cariola . . .
I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers ere she sleep.—Now, what you please:
What death?
Bosola. Strangling; here are your executioners.
D. I forgive them:
The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' the lungs
Would do as much as they do. . . . My body
Bestow upon my women, will you? . . .
Go, tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet."[2]

After the mistress the maid; the latter cries and struggles:

"*Cariola.* I will not die; I must not; I am contracted
To a young gentleman.
1*st Executioner.* Here's your wedding-ring.

[1] *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 2. [2] *Ibid.*

C. If you kill me now,
I am damn'd. I have not been at confession
This two years.
B. When?[1]
C. I am quick with child."[2]

They strangle her also, and the two children of the duchess. Antonio is assassinated; the cardinal and his mistress, the duke and his confidant, are poisoned or butchered; and the solemn words of the dying, in the midst of this butchery, utter, as from funereal trumpets, a general curse upon existence:

"We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,
That, ruin'd yield no echo. Fare you well. . . .
O, this gloomy world!
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!"[3]

"In all our quest of greatness,
Like wanton boys, whose pastime is their care,
We follow after bubbles blown in the air.
Pleasure of life, what is't? only the good hours
Of an ague; merely a preparative to rest,
To endure vexation. . . .
Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust."[4]

You will find nothing sadder or greater from the *Edda* to Lord Byron.

We can well imagine what powerful characters are necessary to sustain these terrible dramas. All these personages are ready for extreme acts; their resolves break forth like blows of a sword; we follow, meet at

[1] "When," an exclamation of impatience, equivalent to "make haste," very common among the old English dramatists.—TR.
[2] *Duchess of Malfi*, iv. 2. [3] *Ibid.* v. 5. [4] *Ibid.* v. 4 and 5.

every change of scene their glowing eyes, wan lips, the starting of their muscles, the tension of their whole frame. Their powerful will contracts their violent hands, and their accumulated passion breaks out in thunder-bolts, which tear and ravage all around them, and in their own hearts. We know them, the heroes of this tragic population, Iago, Richard III., Lady Macbeth, Othello, Coriolanus, Hotspur, full of genius, courage, desire, generally mad or criminal, always self-driven to the tomb. There are as many around Shakspeare as in his own works. Let me exhibit one character more, written by the same dramatist, Webster. No one, except Shakspeare, has seen further into the depths of diabolical and unchained nature. The "White Devil" is the name which he gives to his heroine. His Vittoria Corombona receives as her lover the Duke of Brachiano, and at the first interview dreams of the issue:

> "To pass away the time, I'll tell your grace
> A dream I had last night."

It is certainly well related, and still better chosen, of deep meaning and very clear import. Her brother Flaminio says, aside:

> "Excellent devil! she hath taught him in a dream
> To make away his duchess and her husband."[1]

So, her husband, Camillo, is strangled, the Duchess poisoned, and Vittoria, accused of the two crimes, is brought before the tribunal. Step by step, like a soldier brought to bay with his back against a wall, she defends herself, refuting and defying advocates and judges, incapable of blenching or quailing, clear in mind, ready

[1] *Vittoria Corombona*, i. 2.

in word, amid insults and proofs, even menaced with death on the scaffold. The advocate begins to speak in Latin.

"*Vittoria.* Pray my lord, let him speak his usual tongue;
I'll make no answer else.
Francisco de Medicis. Why, you understand Latin.
V. I do, sir; but amongst this auditory
Which come to hear my cause, the half or more
May be ignorant in't."

She wants a duel, bare-breasted, in open day, and challenges the advocate:

"I am at the mark, sir: I'll give aim to you,
And tell you how near you shoot."

She mocks his legal phraseology, insults him, with biting irony:

"Surely, my lords, this lawyer here hath swallow'd
Some pothecaries' bills, or proclamations;
And now the hard and undigestible words
Come up, like stones we use give hawks for physic:
Why, this is Welsh to Latin."

Then, to the strongest adjuration of the judges:

"To the point,
Find me but guilty, sever head from body,
We'll part good friends; I scorn to hold my life
At yours, or any man's entreaty, sir. . . .
These are but feignèd shadows of my evils:
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils;
I am past such needless palsy. For your names
Of whore and murderess, they proceed from you,
As if a man should spit against the wind;
The filth returns in's face." [1]

[1] Webster Dyce, 1857, *Vittoria Corombona*, p. 20–21.

Argument for argument: she has a parry for every blow: a parry and a thrust:

"But take you your course: it seems you have beggar'd me first,
And now would fain undo me. I have houses,
Jewels, and a poor remnant of crusadoes:
Would those would make you charitable!"

Then, in a harsher voice:

"In faith, my lord, you might go pistol flies;
The sport would be more noble."

They condemn her to be shut up in a house of convertites:

"*V.* A house of convertites! What's that?
Monticelso. A house of penitent whores.
V. Do the noblemen in Rome
Erect it for their wives, that I am sent
To lodge there?" [1]

The sarcasm comes home like a sword-thrust; then another behind it; then cries and curses. She will not bend, she will not weep. She goes off erect, bitter and more haughty than ever:

"I will not weep;
No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice: bear me hence
Unto this house of—. what's your mitigating title?
Mont. Of convertites.
V. It shall not be a house of convertites;
My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal." [2]

[1] *Vittoria Corombona*, iii. 2, p. 23. [2] *Ibid.* p. 24.

Against her furious lover, who accuses her of unfaithfulness, she is as strong as against her judges; she copes with him, casts in his teeth the death of his duchess, forces him to beg pardon, to marry her; she will play the comedy to the end, at the pistol's mouth, with the shamelessness and courage of a courtesan and an empress;[1] snared at last, she will be just as brave and more insulting when the dagger's point threatens her:

"Yes, I shall welcome death
As princes do some great ambassadors;
I'll meet thy weapon half way. . . . 'Twas a manly blow;
The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant;
And then thou wilt be famous."[2]

When a woman unsexes herself, her actions transcend man's, and there is nothing which she will not suffer or dare.

VII.

Opposed to this band of tragic characters, with their distorted features, brazen fronts, combative attitudes, is a troop of sweet and timid figures, pre-eminently tender-hearted, the most graceful and loveworthy, whom it has been given to man to depict. In Shakspeare you will meet them in Miranda, Juliet, Desdemona, Virgilia, Ophelia, Cordelia, Imogen; but they abound also in the others; and it is a characteristic of the race to have furnished them, as it is of the drama to have represented them. By a singular coincidence, the women are more of women, the men more of men, here than elsewhere. The two natures go each to its ex-

[1] Compare Mme. Marneffe in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette*.

[2] *Vittoria Corombona*, v. last scene, pp. 49-50.

treme: in the one to boldness, the spirit of enterprise and resistance, the warlike, imperious, and unpolished character; in the other to sweetness, devotion, patience, inextinguishable affection,[1]—a thing unknown in distant lands, in France especially so: a woman in England gives herself without drawing back, and places her glory and duty in obedience, forgiveness, adoration, wishing and professing only to be melted and absorbed daily deeper and deeper in him whom she has freely and for ever chosen.[2] It is this, an old German instinct, which these great painters of instinct diffuse here, one and all: Penthea, Dorothea, in Ford and Greene; Isabella and the Duchess of Malfi, in Webster; Bianca, Ordella, Arethusa, Juliana, Euphrasia, Amoret, and others, in Beaumont and Fletcher: there are a score of them who, under the severest tests and the strongest temptations, display this wonderful power of self-abandonment and devotion.[3] The soul, in this race, is at once primitive and serious. Women keep their purity longer than elsewhere. They lose respect less quickly; weigh worth and characters less suddenly: they are less apt to think evil, and to take the measure of their husbands. To this day, a great lady, accustomed to company, blushes in the presence of an unknown

[1] Hence the happiness and strength of the marriage tie. In France it is but an association of two comrades, tolerably alike and tolerably equal, which gives rise to endless disturbance and bickering.

[2] See the representation of this character throughout English and German literature. Stendhal, an acute observer, saturated with Italian and French morals and ideas, is astonished at this phenomenon. He understands nothing of this kind of devotion, "this slavery which English husbands have had the wit to impose on their wives under the name of duty." These are "the manners of a seraglio." See also *Corinne*, by Madame de Staël.

[3] A perfect woman already: meek and patient.—HEYWOOD.

man, and feels bashful like a little girl: the blue eyes are dropt, and a child-like shame flies to her rosy cheeks. English women have not the smartness, the boldness of ideas, the assurance of bearing, the precocity, which with the French make of a young girl, in six months, a woman of intrigue and the queen of a drawing-room.[1] Domestic life and obedience are more easy to them. More pliant and more sedentary, they are at the same time more concentrated and introspective, more disposed to follow the noble dream called duty, which is hardly generated in mankind but by silence of the senses. They are not tempted by the voluptuous sweetness which in southern countries is breathed out in the climate, in the sky, in the general spectacle of things; which dissolves every obstacle, which causes privation to be looked upon as a snare and virtue as a theory. They can rest content with dull sensations, dispense with excitement, endure weariness; and in this monotony of a regulated existence, fall back upon themselves, obey a pure idea, employ all the strength of their hearts in maintaining their moral dignity. Thus supported by innocence and conscience, they introduce into love a profound and upright sentiment, abjure coquetry, vanity, and flirtation: they do not lie nor simper. When they love, they are not tasting a forbidden fruit, but are binding themselves for their whole life. Thus understood, love becomes almost a holy thing; the spectator no longer wishes to be spiteful or to jest; women do not think of their own happiness, but of that of the loved ones; they aim not at pleasure, but

[1] See, by way of contrast, all Molière's women, so French; even Agnes and little Louison.

at devotion. Euphrasia, relating her history to Philaster, says:

"My father oft would speak
Your worth and virtue; and, as I did grow
More and more apprehensive, I did thirst
To see the man so prais'd; but yet all this
Was but a maiden longing, to be lost
As soon as found; till sitting in my window,
Printing my thoughts in lawn, I saw a god,
I thought, (but it was you) enter our gates.
My blood flew out, and back again as fast,
As I had puff'd it forth and suck'd it in
Like breath: Then was I call'd away in haste
To entertain you. Never was a man,
Heav'd from a sheep-cote to a sceptre, rais'd
So high in thoughts as I: You left a kiss
Upon these lips then, which I mean to keep
From you for ever. I did hear you talk,
Far above singing! After you were gone,
I grew acquainted with my heart, and search'd
What stirr'd it so: Alas! I found it love;
Yet far from lust; for could I but have liv'd
In presence of you, I had had my end."[1]

She had disguised herself as a page,[2] followed him, was his servant; what greater happiness for a woman than to serve on her knees the man she loves? She let him scold her, threaten her with death, wound her.

"Blest be that hand!
It meant me well. Again, for pity's sake!"[3]

Do what he will, nothing but words of tenderness and

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, Works, ed. G. Colman, 3 vols., 1811, *Philaster*, v.

[2] Like Kaled in Byron's *Lara*.

[3] *Philaster*, iv.

adoration can proceed from this heart, these wan lips. Moreover, she takes upon herself a crime of which he is accused, contradicts him when he asserts his guilt, is ready to die in his place. Still more, she is of use to him with the Princess Arethusa, whom he loves; she justifies her rival, brings about their marriage, and asks no other thanks but that she may serve them both. And strange to say, the princess is not jealous.

"*Euphrasia.* Never, Sir, will I
Marry; it is a thing within my vow:
But if I may have leave to serve the princess,
To see the virtues of her lord and her,
I shall have hope to live.
Arethusa. . . . Come, live with me;
Live free as I do. She that loves my lord,
Curst be the wife that hates her!" [1]

What notion of love have they in this country? Whence happens it that all selfishness, all vanity, all rancour, every little feeling, either personal or base, flees at its approach? How comes it that the soul is given up wholly, without hesitation, without reserve, and only dreams thenceforth of prostrating and annihilating itself, as in the presence of a god? Biancha, thinking Cesario ruined, offers herself to him as his wife; and learning that he is not so, gives him up straightway, without a murmur:

"*Biancha.* So dearly I respected both your fame
And quality, that I would first have perish'd
In my sick thoughts, than e'er have given consent
To have undone your fortunes, by inviting
A marriage with so mean a one as I am:

[1] *Philaster*, v.

I should have died sure, and no creature known
The sickness that had kill'd me. . . . Now since I know
There is no difference 'twixt your birth and mine,
Not much 'twixt our estates (if any be,
The advantage is on my side) I come willingly
To tender you the first-fruits of my heart,
And am content t' accept you for my husband,
Now when you are at lowest . . .
Cesario. Why, Biancha,
Report has cozen'd thee; I am not fallen
From my expected honours or possessions,
Tho' from the hope of birth-right.
B Are you not?
Then I am lost again! I have a suit too;
You'll grant it, if you be a good man. . . .
Pray do not talk of aught what I have said t'ye. . . .
. . . Pity me;
But never love me more! . . . I'll pray for you,
That you may have a virtuous wife, a fair one;
And when I'm dead . . . *C.* Fy, fy! *B.* Think on me sometimes,
With mercy for this trespass! *C.* Let us kiss
At parting, as at coming! *B.* This I have
As a free dower to a virgin's grave,
All goodness dwell with you!"[1]

Isabella, Brachiano's duchess is betrayed, insulted by her faithless husband; to shield him from the vengeance of her family, she takes upon herself the blame of the rupture, purposely plays the shrew, and leaving him at peace with his courtesan, dies embracing his picture. Arethusa allows herself to be wounded by Philaster, stays the people who would hold back the murderer's arm, declares that he has done nothing, that it is not

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, iv.

he, prays for him, loves him in spite of all, even to the end, as though all his acts were sacred, as if he had power of life and death over her. Ordella devotes herself, that the king, her husband, may have children;[1] she offers herself for a sacrifice, simply, without grand words, with her whole heart:

"*Ordella.* Let it be what it may then, what it dare,
I have a mind will hazard it.
Thierry. But, hark you;
What may that woman merit, makes this blessing?
O. Only her duty, sir. *T.* 'Tis terrible!
O. 'Tis so much the more noble.
T. 'Tis full of fearful shadows! *O.* So is sleep, sir,
Or anything that's merely ours, and mortal;
We were begotten gods else: but those fears,
Feeling but once the fires of nobler thoughts,
Fly, like the shapes of clouds we form, to nothing
T. Suppose it death! *O.* I do. *T.* And endless parting
With all we can call ours, with all our sweetness,
With youth, strength, pleasure, people, time, nay reason!
For in the silent grave, no conversation,
No joyful tread of friends, no voice of lovers,
No careful father's counsel, nothing's heard,
Nor nothing is, but all oblivion,
Dust and an endless darkness: and dare you, woman,
Desire this place? *O.* 'Tis of all sleeps the sweetest:
Children begin it to us, strong men seek it,
And kings from height of all their painted glories
Fall, like spent exhalations, to this centre. . . .
T. Then you can suffer? *O.* As willingly as say it.
T. Martell, a wonder!
Here is a woman that dares die.—Yet, tell me,

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *Thierry and Theodoret, The Maid's Tragedy, Philaster.* See also the part of Lucina in *Valentinian.*

Are you a wife? *O.* I am, sir. *T.* And have children?—
She sighs and weeps! *O.* Oh, none, sir. *T.* Dare you venture
For a poor barren praise you ne'er shall hear,
To part with these sweet hopes? *O.* With all but Heaven."[1]

Is not this prodigious? Can you understand how one human being can thus be separated from herself, forget and lose herself in another? They do so lose themselves, as in an abyss. When they love in vain and without hope, neither reason nor life resist; they languish, grow mad, die like Ophelia. Aspasia, forlorn,

"Walks discontented, with her watry eyes
Bent on the earth. The unfrequented woods
Are her delight; and when she sees a bank
Stuck full of flowers, she with a sigh will tell
Her servants what a pretty place it were
To bury lovers in; and make her maids
Pluck 'em, and strew her over like a corse.
She carries with her an infectious grief,
That strikes all her beholders; she will sing
The mournful'st things that ever ear hath heard,
And sigh and sing again; and when the rest
Of our young ladies, in their wanton blood,
Tell mirthful tales in course, that fill the room
With laughter, she will with so sad a look
Bring forth a story of the silent death
Of some forsaken virgin, which her grief
Will put in such a phrase, that, ere she end,
She'll send them weeping one by one away."[2]

Like a spectre about a tomb, she wanders for ever about the remains of her destroyed love, languishes, grows pale, swoons, ends by causing herself to be killed. Sadder

[1] *Thierry and Theodoret*, iv. 1.
[2] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*, i.

still are those who, from duty or submission, allow themselves to be married, while their heart belongs to another. They are not resigned, do not recover, like Pauline in *Polyeucte*. They are crushed to death. Penthea, in Ford's *Broken Heart*, is as upright, but not so strong, as Pauline; she is the English wife, not the Roman, stoical and calm.[1] She despairs, sweetly, silently, and pines to death. In her innermost heart she holds herself married to him to whom she has pledged her soul: it is the marriage of the heart which in her eyes is alone genuine; the other is only disguised adultery. In marrying Bassanes she has sinned against Orgilus; moral infidelity is worse than legal infidelity, and thenceforth she is fallen in her own eyes. She says to her brother:

"Pray, kill me. . . .
Kill, me, pray; nay, will ye?
Ithocles. How does thy lord esteem thee? *P.* Such an one
As only you have made me; a faith-breaker,
A spotted whore; forgive me, I am one—
In act, not in desires, the gods must witness. . . .
For she that's wife to Orgilus, and lives
In known adultery with Bassanes,
Is, at the best, a whore. Wilt kill me now? . . .
The handmaid to the wages
Of country toil, drinks the untroubled streams

[1] Pauline says, in Corneille's *Polyeucte* (iii. 2):

"Avant qu'abandonner mon âme à mes douleurs,
Il me faut essayer la force de mes pleurs;
En qualité de femme ou de fille, j'espère
Qu'ils vaincront un époux, ou fléchiront un père.
Que si sur l'un et l'autre ils manquent de pouvoir,
Je ne prendrai conseil que de mon désespoir.
Apprends-moi cependant ce qu'ils ont fait au temple."

We could not find a more reasonable and reasoning woman. So with Eliante, and Henriette, in Molière.

With leaping kids, and with the bleating lambs,
And so allays her thirst secure; whiles I
Quench my hot sighs with fleetings of my tears."[1]

With tragic greatness, from the height of her incurable grief, she throws her gaze on life:

"My glass of life, sweet princess, hath few minutes
Remaining to run down; the sands are spent;
For by an inward messenger I feel
The summons of departure short and certain. . . Glories
Of human greatness are but pleasing dreams,
And shadows soon decaying; on the stage
Of my mortality, my youth hath acted
Some scenes of vanity, drawn out at length
By varied pleasures, sweeten'd in the mixture,
But tragical in issue. . . . That remedy
Must be a winding-sheet, a fold of lead,
And some untrod-on corner in the earth."[2]

There is no revolt, no bitterness; she affectionately assists her brother who has caused her unhappiness; she tries to enable him to win the woman he loves; feminine kindness and sweetness overflow in her in the depths of her despair. Love here is not despotic, passionate, as in southern climes. It is only deep and sad; the source of life is dried up, that is all; she lives no longer, because she cannot; all go by degrees —health, reason, soul; in the end she becomes mad, and behold her dishevelled, with wide staring eyes, with words that can hardly find utterance. For ten days she has not slept, and will not eat any more; and the same fatal thought continually afflicts her heart, amidst vague dreams of maternal tenderness and happiness

[1] Ford's *Broken Heart*. iii. 2. [2] *Ibid*. iii. 5.

brought to nought, which come and go in her mind like phantoms:

"Sure, if we were all sirens, we should sing pitifully,
And 'twere a comely music, when in parts
One sung another's knell; the turtle sighs
When he hath lost his mate; and yet some say
He must be dead first: 'tis a fine deceit
To pass away in a dream! indeed, I've slept
With mine eyes open, a great while. No falsehood
Equals a broken faith; there's not a hair
Sticks on my head, but, like a leaden plummet,
It sinks me to the grave: I must creep thither;
The journey is not long. . . .
Since I was first a wife, I might have been
Mother to many pretty prattling babes;
They would have smiled when I smiled; and, for certain,
I should have cried when they cried:—truly, brother,
My father would have pick'd me out a husband,
And then my little ones had been no bastards;
But 'tis too late for me to marry now,
I am past child-bearing; 'tis not my fault. . . .
Spare your hand;
Believe me, I'll not hurt it. . . .
Complain not though I wring it hard: I'll kiss it;
Oh, 'tis a fine soft palm!—hark, in thine ear;
Like whom do I look, prithee?—nay, no whispering.
Goodness! we had been happy; too much happiness
Will make folk proud, they say. . . .
There is no peace left for a ravish'd wife,
Widow'd by lawless marriage; to all memory
Penthea's, poor Penthea's name is strumpeted. . . .
Forgive me; Oh! I faint." [1]

She dies, imploring that some gentle voice may sing her

[1] Ford's *Broken Heart*, iv. 2.

a plaintive air, a farewell ditty, a sweet funeral song. I know nothing in the drama more pure and touching.

When we find a constitution of soul so new, and capable of such great effects, it behoves us to look at the bodies. Man's extreme actions come not from his will, but his nature.[1] In order to understand the great tensions of the whole machine, we must look upon the whole machine,—I mean man's temperament, the manner in which his blood flows, his nerves quiver, his muscles act: the moral interprets the physical, and human qualities have their root in the animal species. Consider then the species in this case—namely, the race; for the sisters of Shakspeare's Ophelia and Virgilia, Goethe's Clara and Margaret, Otway's Belvidera, Richardson's Pamela, constitute a race by themselves, soft and fair, with blue eyes, lily whiteness, blushing, of timid delicacy, serious sweetness, framed to yield, bend, cling. Their poets feel it clearly when they bring them on the stage; they surround them with the poetry which becomes them, the murmur of streams, the pendent willow-tresses, the frail and humid flowers of the country, so like themselves:

> "The flower, that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor
> The azure harebell, like thy veins; no, nor
> The leaf of eglantine, whom not to slander,
> Out-sweeten'd not thy breath." [2]

They make them sweet, like the south wind, which with its gentle breath causes the violets to bend their heads,

[1] Schopenhauer, *Metaphysics of Love and Death.* Swift also said that death and love are the two things in which man is fundamentally irrational. In fact, it is the species and the instinct which are displayed in them, not the will and the individual.

[2] *Cymbeline*, iv. 2.

abashed at the slightest reproach, already half bowed down by a tender and dreamy melancholy.[1] Philaster, speaking of Euphrasia, whom he takes to be a page, and who has disguised herself in order to be near him, says:

> "Hunting the buck,
> I found him sitting by a fountain-side,
> Of which he borrow'd some to quench his thirst,
> And paid the nymph again as much in tears.
> A garland lay him by, made by himself,
> Of many several flowers, bred in the bay,
> Stuck in that mystic order, that the rareness
> Delighted me: But ever when he turn'd
> His tender eyes upon 'em, he would weep,
> As if he meant to make 'em grow again.
> Seeing such pretty helpless innocence
> Dwell in his face, I asked him all his story.
> He told me, that his parents gentle dy'd,
> Leaving him to the mercy of the fields,
> Which gave him roots; and of the crystal springs,
> Which did not stop their courses; and the sun,
> Which still, he thank'd him, yielded him his light.
> Then he took up his garland, and did shew
> What every flower, as country people hold,
> Did signify; and how all, order'd thus,
> Express'd his grief: And, to my thoughts, did read
> The prettiest lecture of his country art
> That could be wish'd. . . . I gladly entertain'd him,
> Who was as glad to follow; and have got
> The trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy
> That ever master kept."[2]

The idyl is self-produced among these human flowers: the dramatic action is stopped before the angelic sweet-

[1] The death of Ophelia, the obsequies of Imogen. [2] *Philaster*, i.

ness of their tenderness and modesty. Sometimes even the idyl is born complete and pure, and the whole theatre is occupied by a sentimental and poetical kind of opera. There are two or three such plays in Shakspeare; in rude Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd;* in Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess.* Ridiculous titles nowadays, for they remind us of the interminable platitudes of d'Urfé, or the affected conceits of Florian; charming titles, if we note the sincere and overflowing poetry which they contain. Amoret, the faithful shepherdess, lives in an imaginary country, full of old gods, yet English, like the dewy verdant landscapes in which Rubens sets his nymphs dancing:

"Thro' yon same bending plain
That flings his arms down to the main,
And thro' these thick woods, have I run,
Whose bottom never kiss'd the sun
Since the lusty spring began." . . .

"For to that holy wood is consecrate
A virtuous well, about whose flow'ry banks
The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds,
By the pale moon-shine, dipping oftentimes
Their stolen children, so to make them free
From dying flesh, and dull mortality." . . .[1]

"See the dew-drops, how they kiss
Ev'ry little flower that is;
Hanging on their velvet heads,
Like a rope of christal beads,
See the heavy clouds low falling,
And bright Hesperus down calling
The dead Night from underground."[2]

[1] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess,* i. [2] *Ibid.* ii.

These are the plants and the aspects of the ever fresh English country, now enveloped in a pale diaphanous mist, now glistening under the absorbing sun, teeming with grasses so full of sap, so delicate, that in the midst of their most brilliant splendour and their most luxuriant life, we feel that to-morrow will wither them. There, on a summer night, the young men and girls, after their custom,[1] go to gather flowers and plight their troth. Amoret and Perigot are together; Amoret,

> "Fairer far
> Than the chaste blushing morn, or that fair star
> That guides the wand'ring seaman thro' the deep,"

modest like a virgin, and tender as a wife, says to Perigot:

> "I do believe thee: 'Tis as hard for me
> To think thee false, and harder, than for thee
> To hold me foul." [2]

Strongly as she is tried, her heart, once given, never draws back. Perigot, deceived, driven to despair, persuaded that she is unchaste, strikes her with his sword, and casts her bleeding to the ground. The "sullen shepherd" throws her into a well; but the god lets fall "a drop from his watery locks" into the wound; the chaste flesh closes at the touch of the divine water, and the maiden, recovering, goes once more in search of him she loves:

> "Speak, if thou be here,
> My Perigot! Thy Amoret, thy dear,
> Calls on thy loved name. . . . 'Tis thy friend,
> Thy Amoret; come hither, to give end

[1] See the description in Nathan Drake, *Shakspeare and his Times.*

[2] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, i.

To these consumings. Look up, gentle boy,
I have forgot those pains and dear annoy
I suffer'd for thy sake, and am content
To be thy love again. Why hast thou rent
Those curled locks, where I have often hung
Ribbons, and damask-roses, and have flung
Waters distill'd to make thee fresh and gay,
Sweeter than nosegays on a bridal day?
Why dost thou cross thine arms, and hang thy face
Down to thy bosom, letting fall apace,
From those two little Heav'ns, upon the ground,
Show'rs of more price, more orient, and more round,
Than those that hang upon the moon's pale brow?
Cease these complainings, shepherd! I am now
The same I ever was, as kind and free,
And can forgive before you ask of me:
Indeed, I can and will." [1]

Who could resist her sweet and sad smile? Still deceived, Perigot wounds her again; she falls, but without anger.

"So this work hath end!
Farewell, and live! be constant to thy friend
That loves thee next." [2]

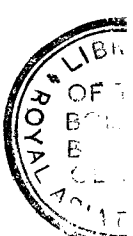
A nymph cures her, and at last Perigot, disabused, comes and throws himself on his knees before her. She stretches out her arms; in spite of all that he had done, she was not changed:

"I am thy love,
Thy Amoret, for evermore thy love!
Strike once more on my naked breast, I'll prove
As constant still. Oh, could'st thou love me yet,
How soon could I my former griefs forget!" [3]

[1] *The Faithful Shepherdess*, IV. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.* V. Compare, as an illustration of the contrast of races, the Italian pastorals, Tasso's *Aminta*, Guarini's *Il Pastor fido*, etc.

Such are the touching and poetical figures which these poets introduce in their dramas, or in connection with their dramas, amidst murders, assassinations, the clash of swords, the howl of slaughter, striving against the raging men who adore or torment them, like them carried to excess, transported by their tenderness as the others by their violence; it is a complete exposition, as well as a perfect opposition of the feminine instinct ending in excessive self-abandonment, and of masculine harshness ending in murderous inflexibility. Thus built up and thus provided, the drama of the age was enabled to bring out the inner depths of man, and to set in motion the most powerful human emotions; to bring upon the stage Hamlet and Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia, the death of Desdemona and the butcheries of Macbeth.

END OF VOL. I.



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